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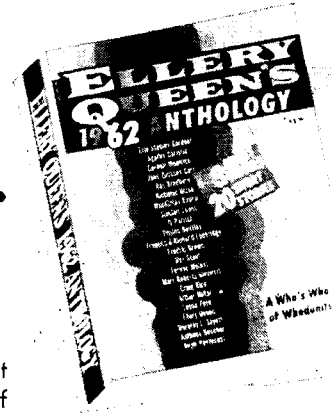

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a new story by

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AUTHOR:	**STANLEY ELLIN**
TITLE:	***The Nine-to-Five Man***
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	New York City
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*A devastatingly minute report on the daily routine of an expert—the best in his line of business . . . First-rate Ellin!*

THE ALARM CLOCK SOUNDED, AS IT did every weekday morning, at exactly 7:20, and without opening his eyes Mr. Keesler reached out a hand and turned it off. His wife was already preparing breakfast—it was her modest boast that she had a built-in alarm to get her up in the morning—and a smell of frying bacon permeated the bedroom. Mr. Keesler savored it for a moment, lying there on his back with his eyes closed, and then wearily sat up and swung his feet out of bed. His eyeglasses were on the night-table next to the alarm clock. He put them on and blinked in the morning light, yawned, scratched his head with pleasure, and fumbled for his slippers.

The pleasure turned to mild irritation. One slipper was not there. He kneeled down, swept his hand back and forth under the bed, and finally found it. He stood up, puffing a little, and went into the bathroom. After lathering his face he discovered that his razor was dull, and discovered immediately afterward that he had forgotten to buy new blades the day before. By taking a few minutes more than usual he managed to get a presentable, though painful, shave out of the old blade. Then he washed, brushed his teeth carefully, and combed his hair. He liked to say that he was in pretty good shape since he still had teeth and hair enough to need brushing.

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In the bedroom again, he heard Mrs. Keesler's voice rising from the foot of the stairway. "Breakfast, dear," she called. "It's on the table now."

It was not really on the table, Mr. Keesler knew; his wife would first be setting the table when he walked into the kitchen. She was like that, always using little tricks to make the house run smoothly. But no matter how you looked at it, she was a sweetheart all right. He nodded soberly at his reflection in the dresser mirror while he knotted his tie. He was a lucky man to have a wife like that. A fine wife, a fine mother—maybe a little bit too much of an easy mark for her relatives—but a real sweetheart.

The small annoyance of the relatives came up at the breakfast table.

"Joe and Betty are expecting us over tonight, dear," said Mrs. Keesler. "Betty called me about it yesterday. Is that all right with you?"

"All right," said Mr. Keesler amiably. He knew there was nothing good on television that evening anyhow.

"Then will you remember to pick up your other suit at the tailor's on the way home?"

"For Betty and Joe?" said Mr. Keesler. "What for? They're only in-laws."

"Still and all, I like you to look nice when you go over there, so please don't forget." Mrs. Keesler hesitated. "Albert's going to be there, too."

"Naturally. He lives there."

"I know, but you hardly ever get a chance to see him, and, after all, he's our nephew. He happens to be a very nice boy."

"All right, he's a very nice boy," said Mr. Keesler. "What does he want from me?"

Mrs. Keesler blushed. "Well, it so happens he's having a very hard time getting a job where—"

"No," said Mr. Keesler. "Absolutely not." He put down his knife and fork and regarded his wife sternly. "You know yourself that there's hardly enough money in the novelties line to make us a living. So for me to take in a lazy—"

"I'm sorry," said Mrs. Keesler. "I didn't mean to get you upset about it." She put a consoling hand on his. "And what kind of thing is that to say, about not making a living? Maybe we don't have as much as some others, but we do all right. A nice house and two fine sons in college—what more could we ask for? So don't talk like that. And go to work, or you'll be late."

Mr. Keesler shook his head. "What a softie," he said. "If you only wouldn't let Betty talk you into these things—"

"Now don't start with that. Just go to work."

She helped him on with his coat in the hallway. "Are you going to take the car today?" she asked.

"No."

"All right, then I can use it for the shopping. But don't forget

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about the suit. It's the tailor right near the subway station." Mrs. Keesler plucked a piece of lint from his coat collar. "And you make a very nice living, so stop talking like that. We do all right."

Mr. Keesler left the house by the side door. It was an unpretentious frame house in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, and like most of the others on the block it had a small garage behind it. Mr. Keesler unlocked the door of the garage and stepped inside. The car occupied nearly all the space there, but room had also been found for a clutter of tools, metal cans, paint brushes, and a couple of old kitchen chairs which had been partly painted.

The car itself was a four-year-old Chevrolet, a little the worse for wear, and it took an effort to open the lid of its trunk. Mr. Keesler finally got it open and lifted out his big, leather sample case, groaning at its weight. He did not lock the garage door when he left, since he had the only key to it, and he knew Mrs. Kessler wanted to use the car.

It was a two block walk to the Beverly Road station of the I.R.T. subway. At a newsstand near the station Mr. Keesler bought a *New York Times,* and when the train came in he arranged himself against the door at the end of the car. There was no chance of getting a seat during the rush hour, but from long experience Mr. Keesler knew how to travel with the least inconvenience. By standing with his back braced against the door and his legs astride the sample case he was able to read his newspaper until, by the time the train reached 14th Street, the press of bodies against him made it impossible to turn the pages.

At 42nd Street he managed to push his way out of the car using the sample case as a battering ram. He crossed the platform and took a local two stations farther to Columbus Circle. When he walked up the stairs of the station he saw by his wrist watch that it was exactly five minutes to nine.

Mr. Keesler's office was in the smallest and shabbiest building on Columbus Circle. It was made to look even smaller and shabbier by the new Coliseum which loomed over it on one side and by the apartment hotels which towered over it on the other. It had one creaky elevator to service its occupants, and an old man named Eddie to operate the elevator.

When Mr. Keesler came into the building Eddie had his mail all ready for him. The mail consisted of a large bundle of letters tied with a string, and a half dozen small cardboard boxes. Mr. Keesler managed to get all this under one arm with difficulty, and Eddie said, "Well, that's a nice big load the same as ever. I hope you get some business out of it."

"I hope so," said Mr. Keesler.

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Another tenant picked up his mail and stepped into the elevator behind Mr. Keesler. "Well," he said, looking at the load under Mr. Keesler's arm, "it's nice to see that somebody's making money around here."

"Sure," said Mr. Keesler. "They send you the orders all right, but when it comes to paying for them where are they?"

"That's how it goes," said Eddie.

He took the elevator up to the third floor and Mr. Keesler got out there. His office was in Room 301 at the end of the corridor, and on its door were painted the words *KEESLER NOVELTIES*. Underneath in quotation marks was the phrase *"Everything for the trade."*

The office was a room with a window that looked out over Central Park. Against one wall was a battered roll-top desk that Mr. Keesler's father had bought when he himself had started in the novelties business along ago, and before it was a large, comfortable swivel chair with a foam-rubber cushion on its seat. Against the opposite wall was a table, and on it was an old L. C. Smith typewriter, a telephone, some telephone books, and a stack of magazines. There was another stack of magazines on top of a large filing cabinet in a corner of the room. Under the window was a chaise-longue which Mr. Keesler had bought second-hand from Eddie for five dollars, and next to the roll-top desk were a wastepaper basket and a wooden coat-rack that he had bought from Eddie for fifty cents. Tenants who moved from the building sometimes found it cheaper to abandon their shopworn furnishings than to pay cartage for them, and Eddie did a small business in selling these articles for whatever he was offered.

Mr. Keesler closed the office door behind him. He gratefully set the heavy sample case down in a corner, pushed open the desk, and dropped his mail and the *New York Times* on it. Then he hung his hat and coat on the rack, checking the pockets of the coat to make sure he had forgotten nothing in them.

He sat down at the desk, opened the string around the mail, and looked at the return address on each letter. Two of the letters were from banks. He unlocked a drawer of the desk, drew out a notebook, and entered the figures into it. Then he tore the receipts into small shreds and dropped them into the wastepaper basket.

The rest of the mail was easily disposed of. Mr. Keesler took each of the smaller envelopes and, without opening it, tore it in half and tossed it into the basket on top of the shredded deposit slips. He then opened the envelopes which were thick and unwieldy, extracted their contents—brochures and catalogues—and placed them on the desk. When he was finished he had a neat pile of catalogues and

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brochures before him. These he dumped into a drawer of the filing cabinet.

He now turned his attention to the cardboard boxes. He opened them and pulled out various odds and ends—good-luck charms, a souvenir coin, a plastic key-ring, several packets of cancelled foreign stamps, and a small cellophane bag containing one chocolate cracker. Mr. Keesler tossed the empty boxes into the wastepaper basket, ate the cracker, and pushed the rest of the stuff to the back of the desk. The cracker was a little bit too sweet for his taste, but not bad.

In the top drawer of the desk were a pair of scissors, a box of stationery, and a box of stamps. Mr. Keesler removed these to the table and placed them next to the typewriter. He wheeled the swivel chair to the table, sat down, and opened the classified telephone directory to its listing of dentists. He ran his finger down a column of names. Then he picked up the phone and dialed a number.

"Dr. Glover's office," said a woman's voice.

"Look," said Mr. Keesler, "this is an emergency. I'm in the neighborhood here, so can I come in during the afternoon? It hurts pretty bad."

"Are you a regular patient of Dr. Glover's?"

"No, but I thought—"

"I'm sorry, but the doctor's schedule is full. If you want to call again tomorrow—"

"No, never mind," said Mr. Keesler. "I'll try someone else."

He ran his finger down the column in the directory and dialed again.

"This is Dr. Gordon's office," said a woman's voice, but much more youthful and pleasant than the one Mr. Keesler had just encountered. "Who is it, please?"

"Look," said Mr. Keesler, "I'm suffering a lot of pain, and I was wondering if the doctor couldn't give me a couple of minutes this afternoon. I'm right in the neighborhood here. I can be there any time that's convenient. Say around two o'clock?"

"Well, two o'clock is already filled, but I have a cancellation here for three. Would that be all right?"

"That would be fine. And the name is Keesler." Mr. Keesler spelled it out carefully. "Thanks a lot, miss, and I'll be there right on the dot."

He pressed the bar of the phone down, released it, and dialed again. "Is Mr. Hummel there?" he said. "Good. Tell him it's about the big delivery he was expecting this afternoon."

In a moment he heard Mr. Hummel's voice. "Yeah?"

"You know who this is?" asked Mr. Keesler.

"Sure I know who it is."

"All right," said Mr. Keesler, "then meet me at four o'clock instead of three. You understand?"

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"I get it," said Mr. Hummel.

Mr. Keesler did not continue the conversation. He put down the phone, pushed aside the directory, and took a magazine from the pile on the table. The back pages of the magazine were full of advertisements for free gifts, free samples, and free catalogues. *Mail us this coupon,* most of them said, *and we will send you absolutely free—*

Mr. Keesler studied these offers, finally selected ten of them, cut out the coupons with his scissors, and addressed them on the typewriter. He typed slowly but accurately, using only two fingers. Then he addressed ten envelopes, sealed the coupons into them, and stamped them. He snapped a rubber band around the envelopes for easier mailing and put everything else in the office back into its proper place. It was now 10:25, and the only thing left to attend to was the *New York Times.*

By twelve o'clock, Mr. Keesler, stretched comfortably out on the chaise-longue, had finished reading the *Times.* He had, however, bypassed the stock market quotations as was his custom. In 1929 his father's entire capital had been wiped out overnight in the market crash, and since that day Mr. Keesler had a cold and cynical antipathy to stocks and bonds and anything connected with them. When talking to people about it he would make it a little joke. "I like to know that my money is all tied up in cash," he would say. But inwardly he had been deeply scarred by what his father had gone through after the debacle. He had been very fond of his father, a gentle and hard-working man, well-liked by all who knew him, and had never forgiven the stock market for what it had done to him.

Twelve o'clock was lunchtime for Mr. Keesler, as it was for almost everyone else in the building. Carrying his mail he walked downstairs along with many others who knew that it would take Eddie quite a while to pick them up in his overworked elevator at this hour. He dropped the letters into a mailbox on the corner, and banged the lid of the mailbox a couple of times for safety's sake.

Near 58th Street on Eighth Avenue was a cafeteria which served good food at reasonable prices, and Mr. Keesler had a cheese sandwich, baked apple, and coffee there. Before he left he had a counterman wrap a cinnamon bun in waxed paper and place it in a brown paper bag for him to take along with him.

Swinging the bag in his hand as he walked, Mr. Keesler went into a drug store a block away and bought a roll of two-inch wide surgical bandage. On his way out of the store he surreptitiously removed the bandage from its box and wrapper and dropped the box and wrapper into a litter basket on

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the street. The roll of bandage itself he put into the bag containing the cinnamon bun.

He repeated this process in a drug store on the next block, and then six more times in various stores on his way down Eighth Avenue. Each time he would pay the exact amount in change, drop the box and wrappings into a litter basket, put the roll of bandage into his paper bag. When he had eight rolls of bandage in the bag on top of the cinnamon bun he turned around and walked back to the office building. It was exactly one o'clock when he got there.

Eddie was waiting in the elevator, and when he saw the paper bag he smiled toothlessly and said as he always did, "What is it this time?"

"Cinnamon buns," said Mr. Keesler. "Here, have one." He pulled out the cinnamon bun wrapped in its waxed paper, and Eddie took it.

"Thanks," he said.

"That's all right," said Mr. Keesler. "There's plenty here for both of us. I shouldn't be eating so much of this stuff anyhow."

At the third floor he asked Eddie to hold the elevator, he'd be out in a minute. "I just have to pick up the sample case," he said. "Got to get to work on the customers."

In the office he lifted the sample case to the desk, put the eight rolls of bandage in it, and threw away the now empty paper bag into the wastepaper basket. With the sample case weighing him down he made his way back to the elevator.

"This thing weighs more every time I pick it up," he said to Eddie as the elevator went down, and Eddie said, "Well, that's the way it goes. We're none of us as young as we used to be."

A block away from Columbus Circle, Mr. Keesler took an Independent Line subway train to East Broadway, not far from Manhattan Bridge. He ascended into the light of Straus Square, walked down to Water Street, and turned left there. His destination was near Montgomery Street, but he stopped before he came to it and looked around.

The neighborhood was an area of old warehouses, decaying tenements, and raw, new housing projects. The street Mr. Keesler was intested in, however, contained only warehouses. Blackened with age they stood in a row looking like ancient fortresses. There was a mixed smell of refuse and salt water around them that invited coveys of pigeons and sea gulls to fly overhead.

Mr. Keesler paid no attention to the birds, nor to the few waifs and strays on the street. Hefting his sample case he turned into an alley which led between two warehouses and made his way to the vast and empty lot behind them. He walked along until he came to a metal door in the third warehouse down the row. Using a large, old-fashioned

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key he opened the door, stepped into the blackness beyond it, and closed it behind him, locking it from the inside and testing it to make sure it was locked.

There was a light switch on the wall near the door. Mr. Keesler put down his sample case and wrapped a handkerchief loosely around his hand. He fumbled along the wall with that hand until he found the switch, and when he pressed it a dim light suffused the building. Since the windows of the building were sealed by metal shutters, the light could not be seen outside. Mr. Keesler then put away the handkerchief and carried the sample case across the vast expanse of the warehouse to the huge door of the delivery entrance that faced on the street.

Near the door was a long plank table on which was a time-stamper, a few old receipt books, and some pencil stubs. Mr. Keesler put down the sample case, took off his coat, neatly folded it and laid it on the table, and placed his hat on top of it. He bent over the sample case and opened it. From it he took the eight rolls of bandage, a large tube of fixative called Quick-Dry, a four-inch length of plumber's candle, two metal cans each containing two gallons of high octane gasoline, six paper drinking cups, a two-yard length of fishline, a handful of soiled linen rags, and a pair of rubber gloves much spattered with drops of dried paint. All this he arranged on the table.

Now donning the rubber gloves he picked up the length of fishline and made a series of loops in it. He fitted a roll of bandage into each loop and drew the string tight. When he held it up at arm's length it looked like a string of white fishing bobbers.

Each gasoline tin had a small spout and looked as if it were tightly sealed. But the lid of one could be removed entirely and Mr. Keesler pried at it until it came off. He lowered the line of rolled bandages into the can, leaving the end of the string dangling over the edge for ready handling. A few bubbles broke at the surface of the can as the gauze bandages started to soak up gasoline. Mr. Keesler observed this with satisfaction, and then, taking the tube of Quick-Dry with him, he made a thoughtful tour of inspection of the warehouse.

What he saw was a broad and high steel framework running through the center of the building from end to end and supporting a great number of cardboard boxes, wooden cases, and paper-covered rolls of cloth. More boxes and cases were stacked nearly ceiling-high against two walls of the room.

He surveyed everything carefully, wrinkling his nose against the sour odor of mold that rose around him. He tested a few of the cardboard boxes by pulling away loose

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pieces, and found them all as dry as dust.

Then having studied everything to his satisfaction he kneeled down at a point midway between the steel framework and the angle of the two walls where the cases were stacked highest and squeezed some fixative on the wooden floor. He watched it spread and settle, and then went back to the table.

From the pocket of his jacket he drew out a finely whetted penknife and an octagon-shaped metal pencil which was also marked off as a ruler. He looked at his wrist watch, making some brief calculations, and measured off a length of the plumber's candle with the ruler. With the penknife he then sliced through the candle and trimmed away some wax to give the wick clearance. Before putting the knife back into his pocket he cleaned the blade with one of the pieces of cloth on the table.

When he looked into the can which contained the bandages soaking in gasoline he saw no more bubbles. He picked up the can and carried it to the place on the floor where the fixative was spread. Slowly reeling up the string so that none of the gasoline would spatter him he detached each roll of wet bandage from it. He loosened a few inches of gauze from six of the bandages and pressed the exposed gauze firmly into the fixative which was now gummy.

Unspooling the bandage as he walked he then drew each of the six lengths of gauze in turn to a designated point. Three went among the boxes on the framework and three went into the cases along the walls. They were nicely spaced so that they radiated like the main strands of a spider web to points high among the packed cases. To reach the farthest points in the warehouse Mr. Keesler knotted the extra rolls of bandage to two of those which he had pulled out short of the mark. There was a sharp reek of gasoline in the warehouse now, added to its smell of mold.

Where the ends of the bandages were thrust between the boxes, Mr. Keesler made sure that the upper box was set back a little to provide a narrow platform. He took the paper drinking cups from the table, filled each with gasoline, and set it on top of the end of the bandage, resting on this platform.

The fixative was now put to work again. Mr. Keesler squeezed some of it over the juncture of the six bandages on the floor which were sealed there by the previous application. While it hardened he went to the table, took a handful of rags, and brought them to the open gasoline can. He lowered each rag in turn into the can, squeezed some of the excess gasoline back into the can after he pulled it out, and arranged all the rags around the fixative.

Then he took the stump of

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plumber's candle which he had prepared and pressed it down into the drying fixative. He tested it to make sure it was tightly set into place, looped the gasoline saturated fishline around and around its base, and pushed the rags close up against it. He made sure that a proper length of candle was exposed, and then stood up to view his handiwork. Everything, as far as he could see, was in order.

Humming a little tune under his breath, Mr. Keesler took the two cans of gasoline and disposed of their contents among the boxes. He handled the cans expertly, splashing gasoline against the boxes where the bandages were attached, pouring it between the boxes wherever he detected a draft stirring in the dank air around him. When the cans were empty he wiped them thoroughly with a rag he had reserved for the purpose and added the rag to the pile around the candle.

Everything that needed to be done had now been done.

Mr. Keesler went back to the table, tightly sealed the gasoline cans, and placed them in the sample case. He pulled off the rubber gloves and put them and the remnant of plumber's candle into the case, too. Then he locked the case and put on his hat and coat.

He carried the case to a point a few feet away from the candle on the floor, set it down, and took out a book of matches from his pocket. Cupping a hand around the matchbox he lit one, and walking with great care while shielding the flame, he approached the candle, bent over it, and lit it. The flame guttered and then took hold.

Mr. Keesler stood up and put out the match, not by shaking it or blowing at it, but by wetting his thumb and forefinger in his mouth and squeezing out the light between them. He dropped the used match into his pocket, went to the back door, switched off the electric light there with his handkerchiefed hand, and drew open the door a few inches.

After peering outside to make sure no one was observing him, Mr. Keesler stepped through the door, locked it behind him, and departed.

He returned to his office by the same route he had come. In the elevator he said to Eddie, "All of a sudden my tooth is killing me. I guess I'll have to run over to the dentist," and Eddie said, "Your teeth sure give you a lot of trouble, don't they?"

"They sure do," said Mr. Keesler.

He left the sample case in his room, washed his hands and face in the lavatory at the opposite end of the hallway, and took the elevator down. The dentist's office was on 56th Street near Seventh Avenue, a few minutes' walk away, and when Mr. Keesler entered the reception room the clock on the

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wall there showed him that it was two minutes before three. He was pleased to see that the dentist's receptionist was young and pretty and that she had his name neatly entered in her appointment book.

"You're right on time," she said as she filled out a record card for him. She handed him the card. "Just give this to Dr. Gordon when you go into the office."

In the office Mr. Keesler took off his glasses, put them in his pocket, and sat back in the dentist's chair. His feet hurt, and it felt good to be sitting down.

"Where does it hurt?" said Dr. Gordon, and Mr. Keesler indicated the back of his lower right jaw. "Right there," he said.

He closed his eyes and crossed his hands restfully on his belly while the doctor peered into his open mouth and poked at his teeth with a sharp instrument.

"Nothing wrong on the surface," Dr. Gordon said. "Matter of fact, your teeth seem to be in excellent shape. How old are you?"

"Fifty," said Mr. Keesler with pride. "Fifty-one next week."

"Wish my teeth were as good," said the dentist. "Well, it might possibly be that wisdom tooth under the gum that's giving the trouble. But all I can do now is put something soothing on it and take X-rays. Then we'll know."

"Fine," said Mr. Keesler.

He came out of the office at 3:30 with a sweet, minty taste in his mouth and with his feet well-rested. Walking briskly he headed for the B.-M.T. subway station at 57th Street and took a train down to Herald Square. He climbed to the street there and took a position among the crowd moving slowly past the windows of R. H. Macy's Department Store, keeping his eyes fixed on the windows as he moved.

At four o'clock he looked at his watch.

At five minutes after four he looked at it with concern.

Then in the window of the store he saw a car coming up to the curb. He walked across the street and entered it, and the car immediately drew away from the curb and fell in with the rest of the traffic on the street.

"You're late, Hummel," said Mr. Keesler to the driver. "Nothing went wrong, did it?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Hummel tensely. "It must have started just about 3:30. The cops called me ten minutes ago to tell me about it. The whole building's going, they said. They wanted me to rush over right away."

"Well, all right," said Mr. Keesler. "So what are you so upset about? Everything is fine. In no time at all you'll have sixty thousand dollars of insurance money in your pocket, you'll be rid of that whole load of stuff you were stuck with—you ought to be a happy man."

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Mr. Hummel awkwardly manipulated the car into a turn that led downtown. "But if they find out," he said. "How can you be so sure they won't? At my age to go to jail —!"

Mr. Keesler had dealt with overwrought clients many times before. "Look, Hummel," he said patiently, "the first job I ever did was thirty years ago for my own father, God rest his soul, when the market cleaned him out. To his dying day he thought it was an accident, he never knew it was me. My wife don't know what I do. Nobody knows. Why? Because I'm an expert. I'm the best in the business. When I do a job I'm covered up every possible way—right down to the least little thing. So quit worrying. Nobody will ever find out."

"But in the daytime," said Mr. Hummel. "With people around. I still say it would have been better at night."

Mr. Keesler shook his head. "If it happened at night, the Fire Marshal and the insurance people would be twice as suspicious. And what do I look like, anyhow, Hummel, some kind of bum who goes sneaking around at night? I'm a nine-to-five man. I go to the office and I come home from the office like anybody else. Believe me, that's the best protection there is."

"It could be," said Mr. Hummel, nodding thoughtfully. "It could be."

A dozen blocks away from the warehouse thick, black smoke could be seen billowing into the air above it. On Water Street, three blocks away, Mr. Keesler put a hand on Mr. Hummel's arm.

"Stop here," he said. "There's always marshals and insurance people around the building looking at people, so this is close enough. You can see all you have to from here."

Mr. Hummel looked at the smoke pouring from the building, at the tongues of flame now and then shooting up from it, at the fire engines and tangles of hose in the street, and at the firemen playing water against the walls of the building. He shook his head in awe. "Look at that," he said, marveling. "Look at that."

"I did," said Mr. Keesler. "So how about the money?"

Mr. Hummel stirred himself from his daze, reached into his trouser pocket, and handed Mr. Keesler a tightly folded roll of bills. "It's all there," he said. "I had it made up the way you said."

There were fourteen hundred-dollar bills and five twenties in the roll. Bending low and keeping the money out of sight Mr. Keesler counted it twice. He had two bank deposit envelopes all filled out and ready in his pocket. Into one which credited the money to the account of *K. E. Esler* he put thirteen of the hundred-dollar bills. Into the other which was made out in the name of *Keesler Novelties* he put a single hundred-dollar bill. The five

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twenties he slipped into his wallet, and from the wallet took out the key to the warehouse.

"Don't forget this," he said, handing it to Mr. Hummel. "Now I have to run along."

"Wait a second," said Mr. Hummel. "I wanted to ask you about something, and since I don't know where to get in touch with you—"

"Yes?"

"Well, I got a friend who's in a very bad spot. He's stuck with a big inventory of fur pieces that he can't get rid of, and he needs cash bad. Do you understand.?"

"Sure," said Mr. Keesler. "Give me his name and phone number, and I'll call him up in a couple of weeks."

"Couldn't you make it any sooner?"

"I'm a busy man," said Mr. Keesler. "I'll call him in two weeks." He took out the book of matches and inside it wrote the name and number Mr. Hummel gave him. He put away the matches and opened the door of the car. "So long, Hummel."

"So long, Esler," said Mr. Hummel.

For the second time that day Mr. Keesler traveled in the subway from East Broadway to Columbus Circle. But instead of going directly to his office this time, he turned down Eighth Avenue and dropped the sealed envelope which contained the $1300 into the night-deposit box of the Merchant's National Bank. Across the street was the Columbus National Bank, and into its night-deposit box he placed the envelope containing the hundred dollars. When he arrived at his office it was ten minutes before five.

Mr. Keesler opened his sample case, threw in the odds and ends that had come in the mail that morning, shut the sample case, and closed the roll-top desk after throwing the *New York Times* into the wastebasket. He took a magazine from the pile on the filing cabinet and sat down in the swivel chair while he looked at it.

At exactly five o'clock he left the office, carrying the sample case.

The elevator was crowded, but Mr. Keesler managed to wedge himself into it. "Well," said Eddie on the way down, "another day, another dollar."

In the subway station Mr. Keesler bought a *World-Telegram,* but was unable to read it in the crowded train. He held it under his arm, standing astride the sample case, half dozing as he stood there. When he got out of the station at Beverly Road he stopped at the stationery store on the corner to buy a package of razor blades. Then he walked home slowly, turned into the driveway, and entered the garage.

Mrs. Keesler always had trouble getting the car into the garage. It stood there now at a slight angle to the wall so that Mr. Keesler had

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to squeeze past it to get to the back of the garage. He opened the sample case, took out the piece of plumber's candle and the tube of Quick-Dry, and put them into a drawer of the workbench there. The drawer was already full of other bits of hardware and small household supplies.

Then he took the two gasoline cans from the sample case and a piece of rubber tubing from the wall and siphoned gasoline from the tank of the car into the cans until they were full. He put them on the floor among other cans which were full of paint and solvent.

Finally he took out the rubber gloves and tossed them on the floor under one of the partly painted chairs. The spatters of paint on the gloves were the exact color of the paint on the chairs.

Mr. Keesler went into the house by the side door, and Mrs. Keesler who had been setting the kitchen table heard him. She came into the living-room and watched as Mr. Keesler turned the sample case upside down over the table. Trinkets rolled all over the table, and Mrs. Keesler caught the souvenir charm before it could fall to the floor.

"More junk," she said good-naturedly.

"Same as always," said Mr. Keesler, "just stuff from the office. I'll give them to Sally's kids." His niece Sally had two pretty little daughters of whom he was very fond.

Mrs. Keesler put her hand over her mouth and looked around. "And what about the suit?" she said. "Don't tell me you forgot about the suit at the tailor's!"

Mr. Keesler already had one arm out of his coat. He stood there helplessly.

"Oh, no," he said.

His wife sighed resignedly.

"Oh, yes," she said. "And you'll go right down there now before he closes."

Mr. Keesler thrust an arm out behind him, groping for the sleeve of his coat, and located it with his wife's help. She brushed away a speck on the shoulder of the coat, and then patted her husband's cheek affectionately.

"If you could only learn to be a little methodical, dear," said Mrs. Keesler.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ROBERT CENEDELLA**

TITLE: ***The Last Treasure***

TYPE: Human Interest Story

LOCALE: Near New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Art dealer Miles Wakefield was on the trail of a bargain—a genuine Balzarini that would bring him a profit of from three to five hundred dollars . . .*

MILES WAKEFIELD DROVE HIS CAR over the rise, turned into the dirt road which a weatherbeaten sign proclaimed to be Fountain Street, and then proceeded more slowly between the trees that stretched to the horizon.

He fervently hoped he would be the first to reach the home of this Arnold Blair. Blair's classified advertisement must have been seen by some of Miles Wakefield's competitors, and surely there would be men from other Madison Avenue art galleries who would be attracted to this place by the opportunity to buy a genuine Balzarini for $75.

Balzarini, of course, was neither a great master nor one of the new crop of non-objectivists who were getting rich so fast; still, his sunny landscapes were prized by people of the middle middle-class who said—all of them—that they liked "a picture you can live with." Miles knew that if he could indeed buy a Balzarini for $75, he could dispose of it within a week at a profit of from three to five hundred dollars.

Miles drove past two small farms, one on either side of the road, before he came at last to a ramshackle house of unpainted clapboard before which stood a surprisingly new sign—*Arnold Blair*. There was a driveway—or rather, there had formerly been a driveway which now was so overgrown that Miles could hear the hiss of weeds under his car.

There was no other car in sight. Either he was first on the scene—or he was too late.

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On the rickety porch he had to knock three times before the door was finally opened by a boy of about sixteen, a boy with straw-colored hair and staring, frightened eyes.

"Is Mr. Blair at home?"

"My grandfather?"

"If he's Mr. Blair." There was something decidedly odd about this boy. He looked intelligent, yet he stared as if he were mentally defective—or as if he were wary, watchful, ready to duck from a blow of Miles Wakefield's hand. He did not reply to Miles; he seemed to be considering what he could possibly say—and so Miles explained himself: "I've come in answer to your grandfather's advertisement. He has a Balzarini for sale?"

"Oh. Well . . . The Balzarini. Well . . ."

The boy's hesitancy was painful. Miles had the feeling the boy wanted to tell him something, but could not bring himself to do so.

Before the boy could make up his mind, a deep voice called from somewhere in the house: "Who is it, Davey?"

Miles called back: "Mr. Blair? I've come to look at your Balzarini."

"Well, come in, come in!" The deep voice was cordial. "Bring the gentleman in, Davey."

The boy expelled his breath in a long sigh—as if some great issue had been settled for him. He stood aside, looking—perhaps *resigned* was the word, Miles thought, as he followed the boy through a hallway and into a small and sparsely furnished living room.

"Welcome!"

The owner of the deep voice was a tall, spare, white-haired man who got up from his rocker as Miles and Davey entered. Miles waited a moment, but the man simply stood expectantly by his chair, his eyes apparently fixed on something behind Miles.

Arnold Blair was blind.

In the instant Miles realized that, he went directly across the room and shook the old man's hand.

"I'm Miles Wakefield," he said.

"Nice of you to come, Mr. Wakefield." The old man smiled and sat down, motioning to Miles to be seated too. "I don't have much contact with my fellow men any longer, and you can't think how delighted I am to—er—" he chuckled—"well, not to see you, but to touch your hand and hear your voice. The voice tells me you're about thirty-three years old."

"Thirty-four," said Miles.

"You've got a very young voice for your age." The old man chuckled again, as if at a joke he had often made before. "I suppose you'd like to get down to business?"

"Well, yes. I'm interested in your Balzarini."

"All right. Davey, we won't be needing you for a while."

"All right, grandfather."

Miles turned to watch the boy go out of the room. But instead, Davey went to the door, looking intently

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at Miles—as though trying to communicate something to him; then with his hand he pushed the door, which shut with a loud click. As Miles started to speak, the boy put his finger to his lips, imploring Miles with the gesture and with his wild staring eyes not to let the old man know that Davey was still in the room.

Mr. Blair was talking, but Miles, gazing at the boy, could not listen. He could only wonder what he should do. Davey stood rigid, frightened, his finger still over his lips, waiting for Miles's decision. It occurred to Miles that he did not have to make his decision now, that the boy would probably come to the front door with him later, and that if he did not explain himself then, Miles could return to let the old man know what had happened.

He nodded then at Davey, and turned to Mr. Blair.

"I'm sorry," Miles said. "I'm afraid I got lost in thought just then."

"I was just talking about Davey," the old man said. "My grandson. He's a wonderful boy. I wish I could do more for him, but I'm afraid it's the other way around." Mr. Blair hesitated a moment, then said, "Do you know what that boy did for me, Mr. Wakefield?"

"No."

"Well, you have to understand that I've fallen on bad days. Oh, I was never wealthy, but I was—well, comfortable. I had beautiful things. I liked beautiful things. That's what made it so hard when . . ." He touched his eyelid with a slim fingertip and smiled. "Forgive me," he said. "I'm too old for self-pity, and after all, I have had a good life. Until lately."

"I'm sorry," said Miles.

For a long moment the old man did not speak, and when he did, his voice was trembling with emotion. "One month ago I reached the end of my financial resources, Mr. Wakefield—all but the Balzarini. For a long time I've been able to earn nothing myself, and Davey—well, he's brought in a few dollars with odd jobs that he does in the town, but . . . Mr. Wakefield, one month ago, when my need was desperate, Davey left me alone for three whole days. I don't know where he went—I suppose to New York—but when he came back, Mr. Wakefield, that boy put into my hand two hundred dollars!"

The old man did not even try to hide the moisture in his eyes.

Glancing around at Davey, Miles saw that the boy's lips were trembling.

"I don't know where he got the money," Mr. Blair went on. "He told me he worked for it. For all I know, he may have stolen it. I only know that whatever he did, he did for love of me."

"That's all you should think about then," said Miles.

"Yes." The old man whispered it. Then clearing his throat, he arose.

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"I shouldn't have talked so much," he said. "Do you want to see the Balzarini now?"

"Very much."

"It's my last treasure," said the old man. "I loved it so much when I had my sight that I refused to part with it. Until now. Come, it's hanging in the next room."

Miles attempted to take the old man's arm, but Mr. Blair shrugged him off. "I know my way about this house," he said. He walked to a door leading to the next room, threw it open, and entered. Miles followed, and Davey—wearing sneakers, Miles noticed—came to the door and stood just inside the room.

"There!" said the old man. "My Balzarini!"

He pointed his finger to the opposite wall. Hanging there was a plain black frame. In the frame there was glass. Back of the glass there was nothing.

Nothing. No Balzarini. No picture at all.

Miles looked from the picture to the old man, and from the old man to young Davey. Once again the boy's eyes implored him. Once again Davey put his finger over his lips. The boy had gone to town, thought Miles, and returned with two hundred dollars—and this month the old man had eaten because the boy had done that.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" said the old man.

"Yes," said Miles. "Beautiful."

"You'll buy it?"

"Why . . . I . . ." Then Miles nodded to himself. "I'll have to examine it," he said. "And I doubt that I can pay seventy-five. If you'll take fifty . . ."

The look of gratitude on young Davey's face was beautiful to see, and Miles could not remember when he had felt so good . . .

When Miles Wakefield had gone with the empty frame, the boy and his grandfather returned to the room where the frame had hung. The boy went to a chest, opened a wide drawer, took from it another empty frame, and hung it where the first had been.

Then the old man and the boy sat and waited for the next art dealer to arrive.

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The teenage 'tec and the school spirit—correspondence school, of course . . . another adventure of wisecracker Wally Watts . . .

Wally and the Class Reunion

by PAUL W. FAIRMAN

The Watchful Eye Detective School
Parker Building
New York, New York

Mr. Walter A. Watts
Lettyville, New York

My Dear Wally:

Yours received in which you ask me to send you the names of the other students who enrolled at Watchful Eye about the same time you did. This, of course, was a request I would automatically view with suspicion regardless of whom it came from. But coming from you I was doubly wary and my reaction was a quick and definite NO.

However, after giving your idea some further thought, I am inclined to change my mind. The suggestion of a class reunion by mail is a novel one indeed. There is certainly nothing wrong with Watchful Eye students corresponding among themselves and as long as you are willing to do all the promotional work I have decided not to stand in your way.

Therefore, you will find enclosed a list of about two hundred names and addresses. I wish to point out—and with considerable pride—that the list covers every state in the union except Alaska and Hawaii and is proof of the national acceptance accorded the Watchful Eye Detective School.

Cordially,
John Hayden, President

Dear Johnny:

Thanks a million, old pal, for going along with my idea of a class reunion. The list of two hundred of my old school classmates is of course all I need to get things rolling. And you're right, Johnny, about my being willing to dig into the drudgery of getting our mailbox get-together off the ground. I've had Pearl—that's my girl friend—writing letters like mad. She did a whale of a job which I would have done myself of

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course but I'm too busy working in the grocery store here in Lettyville where I have to stay until I'm old enough to get my private op's license, which won't be for a while yet.

I was even too busy to get this letter off to you right away, Johnny old pal, and in the meantime two things have happened. First, the alumni answered my letters practically to a man, every one of them with real class spirit.

And the second thing that's already happened is the worthless stock deal. I send each fellow-alumnus a share of phoney stock and all but three of them came right back at me with payment for same. It's certainly a pleasure, Johnny old pal, to be associated with such a good group. You ought to be proud of them.

Yours for school spirit,
Wally

Dear Watts:

I'm writing this from home as I don't want correspondence of this nature to even appear on official Watchful Eye stationery—in fact, I would prefer to have no further contact with you whatsoever. But there's one question I must ask before I go to the authorities: have you fallen so low that you conned me out of a mailing list for the sole purpose of selling worthless stock to unsuspecting people?

We won't go into the fact that I'm the prize sucker of all time for even opening the letter you wrote to me requesting the list. Let's just say that my inherent sense of fairplay forces me to ask you for an explanation before talking to the postal authorities—among others. Of course there *isn't* any explanation except the obvious one, so the forty-eight hours I'm allowing you in which to answer this letter is of course wasted; but I'll allow it anyhow.

Sincerely,
John Hayden

Dear Johnny:

We've been having so many special sales here at the grocery store and I've been so darned busy that I guess I overlooked giving you the details about the phoney stock swindle. This was how it happened.

A week or so before I wrote you the first time, a real slick character who called himself J. Henry Hamlin came to Lettyville and made a big thing about looking over property for investment. He didn't buy any

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property though—in fact, he sold some. The day after he sneaked out of town we found he'd sold Mrs. Manson two thousand shares of phoney oil stock—some very pretty paper called Inter-Ocean Petroleum Associates, Inc. Mrs. Manson didn't mind the money—two thousand bucks—she's got more moola than anybody in town. But she needs more husbands than most women, having gone through four already, and that's what she thought she had, the fifth, until this slicker took the train on the q.t.

So there was a lot of excitement in Lettyville (Pop. 3,000) with everybody tickled that the swindler had skedaddled before cleaning out the whole town. But I'm always using my head, old pal, and so I got an idea how to pep up our class reunion.

As you can see, this last was kind of a problem. Ordinary reunions can get together in a hotel and whoop it up, but singing the class song —if we had one—into a mailbox can fall pretty flat. So I started my Share-the-Crime plan.

First, I talked Mrs. Manson into letting me have the worthless stock—two hundred certificates marked ten shares each. Then I sent one to each alumnus that was in on the class reunion. Pearl sent along a bill with each one and the response, as I told you, was almost 100 per cent. A real good group, Johnny.

Mrs. Case just called. She says the collapsible ladder we sold her just collapsed, so I've got to go over and see what's wrong with it. More later.

Yours in a hurry,
Wally

Dear Wally:

Your letter was most interesting but I'm beginning to think you learned more from J. Henry Hamlin, the stock swindler, than you did from Watchful Eye. We teach our students to apprehend criminals, not to imitate them.

I'm assuming the whole thing was a gallant attempt to get Mrs. Mason's money back for her—a Robin Hood gesture. More of a Spread-the-Loss idea, I'd say, than Share-the-Crime. But this in no way lessens the criminal act you have committed—using the mails to defraud.

Now that you've thought the thing over, you are no doubt ready to go to the authorities and confess everything. I sincerely hope they will not be too hard on you. I'm sure the first offense angle will weigh in your favor and I will certainly speak highly for your character, and help in any way I can.

Yours for courage,
Johnny

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Dear Johnny:

You sure are true-blue in offering to front for me with the law and believe me, I'll never forget it. But Johnny old pal, like I said, Mrs. Manson doesn't care a hoot and a holler about the money. And even if she did, it wouldn't be honest asking Watchful Eye graduates to pay it back. So I used the cash that came in to start an Alumni Fund and pay expenses. Part of it has already been spent to buy my girl Pearl a gold plated ball-point pen for her birthday. That's legitimate because she wore out the one she had writing letters to the alumni.

And I'm not planning to confess anything to the authorities—I figure what they don't know won't hurt them.

There's a long line at the checkout counter and I've got to start beating the cash register.

More later,
Wally

Dear Watts:

All I can say is that you've been devilishly clever in hiding that latent criminal nature of yours. But now it has obviously come out in the open. I withdraw all I said about interceding for you or furnishing character references. I wash my hands of you and hang my head in shame because this affair will certainly reflect disgracefully on Watchful Eye although the school is innocent and will, I'm sure, be adjudged so.

One point confuses me greatly. I have contacted several students whose names were on the list I so stupidly gave you and they are all enthusiastic about the class reunion idea. But not one of them wrote me a single line about buying phoney stock from you. Perhaps they are too ashamed to talk about it. Or maybe you've figured out a way to intimidate them—to terrorize them into silence.

Anyhow, I'm again giving you just forty-eight hours—except that I'm cutting it to twenty-four. Answer quickly and completely.

John Hayden

Johnny, Old Pal:

We ran out of most of the specials we had on sale here at the grocery store, so I've got a little more time to write and give you the lowdown on everything including my class reunion gimmick—the Share-the-Crime Club. But first, one thing about your last letter—where you say the alumni won't tell you anything about the phoney stock deal.

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You forget how good a teacher you are, Johnny old pal. If you'll check back on Lesson Number Two—*The Art of Obtaining Information Indirectly*—you'll see that you told us a detective's work is always confidential—that we aren't supposed to talk about a case to anybody. So they figure *anybody* includes you too, Johnny.

Because that's what we're on. A case. You see, I figured nothing would be too tough for the good old Watchful Eye class of '59, so we're hunting for the sharpie who shilled poor old Mrs. Manson out of her loot—hunting for him from border to border and coast to coast. And believe you me, we're going to find him!

About the stock, I only charged the alumni members 50 cents apiece for the certificates. That way, I killed two rabbits with the same rock. I got some money for the Alumni Fund and distributed a vital piece of evidence in our Share-the-Crime plan. And I'm expecting reports hourly.

So everything is working out fine, Johnny. Don't you worry about a thing.

Yours for more faith in human nature,
Wally

Dear Wally:

I think it's time I've had a checkup on my mental health. I've started to have bad dreams. Last night, after reading your letter, I dreamed about a long, endless line of skillets with your letters involved in some way. Anyhow, I kept jumping from one skillet to the next, hoping to escape. But the next skillet was always bigger and hotter the one I jumped out of. Then I woke up in a cold sweat, wondering if you have the remotest idea of what you've done. Just about ruined Watchful Eye, that's all.

Most of our Watchful Eye students are young, eager, and full of ambition. But they are without much experience and can easily make mistakes. And mistakes are certainly going to be made by the bucketful as a result of your setting them off on this wild manhunt of yours.

I can hear the howls of indignation from every state in the union (except Alaska and Hawaii) as misguided Watchful Eye students start signing complaints against every salesman of stocks and bonds in sight. There are many honest ones, you know—sincere, hard-working men with wives and children to support. Also with fine reputations waiting to be ruined by your stupidity. Libel suits and false arrest complaints will certainly crowd court calendars from the rock-bound coast of Maine to the sunny shores of California.

It would seem to me that even *you* should have had sense enough to

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know that a stock swindler never uses the same name twice, and always has fresh stock certificates with a new company name for each job.

I am now going for an appointment with my lawyer. He will probably advise me to close the school myself before the authorities do.

Yours in the midst of ruin,
Johnny

Dear Johnny:

Don't worry about a thing. Wait till the news breaks that Walter Watts, a Watchful Eye graduate, captured a phoney stock swindler—with a slight assist from Watchful Eye graduate Percy Palmer of Three Oaks, Iowa.

Because that's how it happened, old pal. Following my instructions to the letter—the ones I had Pearl mimeograph and sent out to the alumni—Percy Palmer had J. Henry Hamlin arrested in the act of selling Percy's Aunt Harriet a load of worthless oil stock.

Of course the swindler was now calling himself D. David Dandridge instead of J. Henry Hamlin, and his stock was called Off-Shore Petroleum Interests, Ltd. instead of Inter-Ocean Petroleum Associates, Inc.; but he was the same crook—a guy named Joe Pender—and the stock all came off the same printing press.

And another neat development: Mrs. Manson said she'd pay me a reward for locating J. Henry Hamlin or whatever you want to call him. So things turned out just dandy.

Naturally, Johnny old pal, after taking your course, I knew all about what you said in your last letter—about swindlers changing their names and the pattern of their wallpaper with each new job. But there wasn't any danger of getting the wrong man. That's why I sent each alumnus a stock certificate.

Oops! The checkout line's getting long again.

Wally

Dear Wally:

I'm writing this from my bed of pain. And that's not figurative. My doctor ordered a few days' rest after the mental wear and tear I've gone through. He says I must be very quiet, so I'll make this letter short.

Just one question, old pal. How did sending each alumnus a worthless stock certificate prevent the possibility of mistaken identity?

Yours in tottering health,
Johnny

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Dear Johnny:

Awfully sorry to hear that you haven't been feeling up to snuff. I suppose running a fine school like Watchful Eye *can* wear a man down.

Things are tough with me too, Johnny. A big disappointment—Mrs. Manson reneged on the reward. As I told you, she didn't want her money back. She wanted J. Henry Hamlin and said *he* was what she had agreed to pay for. But even when she offered to sign no complaint against him and even to intercede for him—by way of her check book—J. Henry still decided to take the rap instead of coming back to wedding bells with Mrs. Manson. Which was a smart decision if you ask me.

But it leaves me broke just the same. The alumni fund all went for postage and stationery and the ball-point pen I bought Pearl, and I figured with the reward I'd have a few dollars left to start next year's reunion. Even ten bucks would have been a real big help.

Yours in discouragement,
Wally

Dear Wally:

I arise from my sickbed to write the enclosed check for $10.00. Now—to repeat—how did the stock certificates, etc. You know the question. Answer by return mail.

Johnny

Dear Johnny:

Thanks a million for your generous contribution to The Watchful Eye Alumni Fund. With this as a start, next year's reunion will be bigger and better than ever.

As for the certificates, I guess you've forgotten about the handy, dandy little fingerprint outfit you give every student that takes your course. That was why I sent the certificates. Because J. Henry's prints were all over every one of them. That gave the alumni a sure-fire method of identifying him and also some valuable practice in using The Watchful Eye Kit. So you see, they couldn't go wrong!

By the way, old pal, Pearl (that's my girl friend) wants me to ask if you possibly have a list of girl students. She thinks it would be a great idea to start a pen-pal club. I do too.

Don't you?

Walter A. Watts
(The A is for Alert)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **GORDON GASKILL**

TITLE: ***Yo-Ho-Ho and a Bottle of — Death***

TYPE: Detective Novelette

LOCALE: Corsica

TIME: 1950

COMMENTS: *A tale of treasure-hunting in the waters off Corsica—and of death lurking in a strange jungle under water . . .*

I'D BEEN IN CORSICA LESS THAN FIFteen minutes when I found out my two weeks' vacation wasn't going to be quite the lazy cruise I'd expected.

Even during the war, Rocky used to talk about some day going sailing in his own boat in the Mediterranean. Now he was really doing it. At least, he'd chartered a boat for two months, and he'd asked me to join him in Corsica.

"Forget your musty lawbooks," his letter had said. "Besides, pal, take a vacation while the taking's good. Won't be long before someone runs a finger down the reserve lists and finds Robert B. Tillson, Lt. Col. Then, whammy, you'll be back on oxygen in a B-29 somewhere over a rice paddy."

For him, it was even closer. He was still in the Air Force, stationed in Wiesbaden, Germany, and this two months' accumulated leave was probably the last he could expect for a long, long time.

Corsica in a sailboat sounded like a fine idea, and I had a vacation coming, anyway. I took a plane to Paris, changed there for one to Calvi in Corsica.

Rocky met the plane, looking not at all like the smooth Major James T. Rockford I'd last seen, a year ago, in Washington. He was wearing a dirty white yachting cap, a dirtier yellow T-shirt, khaki shorts last laundered in 1940, and some canvas shoes with rope soles. He was the color of mahogany and was full of bounce.

"Hiyah, Colonel, pal, buddy!" he yelled, plus some other titles of ad-

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dress I hope the French don't understand. "Welcome to Corsica, the Pearl of the Mediterranean, the Island of Beauty!"

It was that, all right. The taxi took us through a pine grove that bordered a stunning white beach, curving around the bay in almost a complete circle. Mountains over 8,000 feet high came right down to the sea, into water that was every conceivable shade of blue and green. The town of Calvi itself looked like a medieval fortress, jutting out into the sea in great battlements.

The taxi let us off at the fisherman's quay, and I asked Rocky, "Which is your boat?"

"Paladin's not here," he said. "She's down the coast a piece. We'll get there this afternoon . . . Brother, let's go get a beer and some lunch and have words." He seemed oddly buoyant and excited.

We went to an outdoor café and he took a table off in the corner, away from anybody else. He could hardly wait until the waiter brought the beers. Then finally he let me have it.

"Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of beer!" he said. "Brother, hold on to your chair. We're not just gentlemen of leisure. We're treasure hunters! Gold! Bucks! Dough!"

"Income tax!" I added. "Is this your first beer today? And if it is, give the colonel the big picture."

Under all the flimflam, he was dead-serious. I'll cut the story short:

Rocky loves boats; and when he was stationed in Berlin for the air lift, he spent all his spare time at the American yacht club on the Wannsee, where they used requisitioned German sailboats. His had belonged to a Baron Kurt von Hellberg. In those days the club was *verboten* to all German civilians, but the baron managed to sneak in from time to time to look after his boat.

"I liked that," Rocky said. "I had a boat myself, and I knew how he felt."

They got to be pretty good friends, and Rocky took von Hellberg out sailing, in his own boat. They swapped war experiences. The baron was a young guy and he'd been an E-boat skipper in the German navy. He told about this treasure business. It was just talk at first, and then it dawned on them that the treasure was probably still there.

It seems that in September 1943 the French invaded Corsica, and the Germans there began retreating north. The Nazi SS headquarters in Ajaccio, the capital, had a slush fund for paying off their agents. They had all kinds of currency, but especially gold and dollar bills, since they were acceptable everywhere. They wanted to get this out of danger, of course, and they sent a small motor convoy to take it north.

But by this time the Corsican resistance was playing havoc with

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German communications—blowing up bridges and ambushing stragglers. And just north of a place called Sagone, where the road runs along the sea, the SS convoy with the money was ambushed.

The Storm Troopers were no pushovers. They fought back hard, but only four of them got away. One of them, a sergeant, was smart enough to hide the box by a rock on the beach. It was nighttime, and the four of them managed to work their way north to Calvi, which the Germans still held.

In Calvi they reported what had happened. And it must have been a lot of money, because the Germans decided to try to get it back. The next night they sent an E-boat—about like one of our PT boats—to find their precious box.

Von Hellberg was the skipper, and the SS sergeant went along as guide.

The box was still there, and they got it aboard. But it had taken them a long time to find it, and it was about dawn when they headed north again. Von Hellberg couldn't afford to be caught out in broad daylight, since by this time we had planes all over the place. There was nothing he could do but stick close to the coast, go slow enough to leave no telltale wake, and pray that nobody would spot him.

But one of our planes was on the ball and went for him. The E-boat fought back with all the ack-ack it had, which wasn't much, but our guy was better. He got a direct hit and the E-boat began sinking. Von Hellberg tried to beach her, but just before he reached shore, she hit a rock and blew to pieces.

Von Hellberg and the SS sergeant were in the flying bridge together, and they were the only two to get away. They were blown clear, into the water, and swam ashore. They got to Calvi just as the Germans were pulling out. Later both of them got the Iron Cross for the try.

That was it.

"So somewhere," I said, "on the bottom of the sea off Corsica there's a box of gold and soggy dollars. Wouldn't it be easier to look for needles in haystacks?"

"It's not that bad," Rocky explained. "Von Hellberg knows within, say, ten miles where it was. And the west coast of Corsica is so steep that in most places you could take a battleship in close enough to shake hands with somebody ashore and still not go aground. There aren't many places where a shallow-draft boat like an E-boat would hit before it got to shore. The chart shows about twenty places like that in those ten miles. So it's bound to be in very shallow water."

"If it's still there," I pointed out.

"You have a point. Currents, winds, waves might have moved it off into deep water and, if so, we're going to have a nice vacation and nothing more. But there's a fifty-fifty chance she's still there."

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"If it's so shallow," I argued, "wouldn't somebody else have found it already?"

He nodded. "Possible, but not probable. For one thing, we'd have heard about it from fishermen. And Corsica isn't the French Riviera. Not many people come here, and most of those that do come are likely to got to few places, as here in Calvi. The coasts are fairly inaccessible if you don't have a boat. And tourists don't have boats."

"Fishermen do," I said.

"But fishermen," he replied, don't go in for underwater fishing. That's tourist stuff."

"Come again, please? I thought most fishing was underwater."

"The law sure sharpens the wits, doesn't it? The French are nuts about goggle-fishing, mask-fishing, submarine fishing—I don't know what you call it back home. You wear a mask and breathe through a tube, and when you spot a fish, you go down and shoot it with a kind of rifle that shoots a harpoon."

"I've heard of it," I said. "Sounds like a lot of fun."

"You'll get plenty of it, brother," he grinned. "We do nothing else all day long. That's the way we're looking for this E-boat wreck."

"Another thing," I asked. "Who else knows about this?"

"Von Hellberg says the SS unit was transferred to the Eastern front after that, and nobody came back."

"So it's this German and you and, now, me."

"And a girl," Rocky said, grinning.

"Of course," I said. "Of course there has to be a girl."

"'Tain't romantic son," he said, shaking his head. "She's my general's secretary in Wiesbaden. Every wolf in the service has been baying under her window, including this gallant major. No soap for anybody. I thought I had the inside track, maybe, because she's nuts about sailing and we used to go out on the Rhine. But unh-unh. Anyway, she knew I was doing this Mediterranean jaunt, and she said she wanted to come, too—and chip in her part."

"Of course you had to take her."

"Wait till you see her. Fine girl, wonderful sailor, good swimmer, good cook, looks like Hollywood. She sleeps in the forepeak, and von Hellberg and I bunk in the main cabin."

"So he's with you, too."

"Of course—he's the guide. He's putting up the information and I'm providing the boat and his keep. As a matter of fact, he's had all the tough luck so far—if it was luck."

There was a quality in his voice that made me look up.

"Something funny happened," he went on, "the second night we were here in Calvi. We went ashore and left von Hellberg alone on the boat. A southwest wind began making up, and Kurt decided he'd better put out a second anchor to windward.

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"It's a pretty tricky work. Our dinghy's a little eggshell, the water was choppy already, and our bower anchor is heavy and awkward. He was standing up in the pitching dinghy, alongside our bow, trying to manhandle the anchor into the dinghy—and that's all he remembers."

"Clear it up," I said.

"I wish I could. Something knocked him overboard, something big and heavy, and when he hit the water he was unconscious. He doesn't remember a thing about it."

"And the water brought him to?"

"Not a bit. He'd have drowned if a Frenchman on the next boat hadn't heard the splash. He went in after Kurt and got him out."

"The Frenchman probably wanted to toss him back in when he found von Hellberg was a Kraut," I put in.

Rocky chuckled. "The war's been over a long time, son. The French seem to have cooled off about the Germans even before we did. Although the Corsicans are different."

"How different?"

"You must have heard about the vendettas. Corsica is the home of them, and the French still have trouble with them today. If somebody in the family is killed, the whole clan feels bound to get revenge on the killer."

"So maybe some Corsican had somebody killed by the Germans in the war, and took it out on von Hellberg? Doesn't sound likely."

"I know," Rocky said. "A vendetta isn't a general thing, it's personal. That is, a Corsican wouldn't go after just any German. It would have to be one particular German, the one who did the killing to provoke a Corsican's revenge."

"What did the police think of it, if you went to them?" I asked.

"Not much," he said. "They said that unless von Hellberg had done something specifically himself, he'd be in no danger. And von Hellberg swears, and I believe him, that he had nothing at all to do with whatever atrocities the Germans committed in Corsica. It was mostly the SS. Kurt was in the navy and kept his nose clean."

"So what did happen?" I asked.

"The locals are all fishermen and know boats," Rocky said. "They think when he was wrestling the anchor in the dinghy, he lost his balance and klinked himself with the anchor. It went overboard, too, by the way. Kurt's no help. He just can't remember anything. Although I think he's too good a sailor to have let that happen. Anyway, he had a bad head for a couple of days, and that was all."

"It was fast work for the Frenchman," I said.

"Thank heavens!" Rocky nodded. "After that, we got to know him pretty well, of course. You'll meet him. His yacht's in Girolata, too. A beauty."

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Rocky paid for the lunch, and we walked along the quay to a little shop that sold fishing gear, where Rocky bought three new trident heads for his harpoon.

"I never thought they'd break so fast," he said. "I've got just one on the boat, and it's worn to a nubbin. One prong's even broken off. That happens when you miss a fish and hit a rock square on."

We bought me a mask and breathing tube. The masks were oval pieces of plate glass set in soft rubber. I tried on several before I found one that was airtight when I inhaled with closed mouth.

The mask and tube cost about three dollars.

"Pretty cheap way to go treasure-hunting," I said. "I thought you'd have to have a regular diving suit, pumps, air hoses, and all that."

"The French make some submarine fishing gear I'd love to have, at that," Rocky said. "There's a sponge-rubber suit that keeps you warm, even in cold water, for hours. Then they have a little tank of compressed air that lets you stay entirely under water for an hour. They'd be nice, but they cost a lot of dough, and it's almost impossible to get the tank filled in a place like Corsica. Besides, these masks are good enough for us. You can see down a good fifty feet with them, and if the E-boat is any deeper than that, nobody will ever see her at all. A few hundred yards out, it's six hundred feet deep."

We left Calvi at three, on a motor launch named Albatross that makes the run every day, weather permitting, to a place called Girolata. That was where Paladin was anchored.

"We've worked over the southern half of our area," Rocky said. "Girolata is fine. It's the only really good anchorage in the area, outside of Calvi, and it's smack in the center of our northern area."

The Albatross was jammed with French campers, most of them young. Nearly every one had a submarine rifle, and Rocky borrowed one of them and explained it to me.

It was a glorified slingshot. A long, steel arrow fitted along the top of the barrel. Two very strong black rubber cables, with a U-shaped piece between, provided the power. You pulled them back and hooked the U-piece in a notch on the arrow. There was a pistol grip and a safety catch, and that was that.

The arrow was permanently tied to the rifle by a length of heavy cord, which looked only about three yards long. Obviously, that was as far as the arrow could fly.

"Can you really get that close to a fish?" I asked.

"You'd be surprised," Rocky said. "You can almost tickle their backs before they get scared and take off. You can buy double rubber super cables that throw the arrow a lot farther, but you don't really need them. Most shots are at

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a range of only one or two yards."

The arrow was threaded at its business end so that with a couple of hard turns you could easily screw on different kinds of heads. For big fish, there was a single-pointed head with a folding barb that prevented the arrow's pulling loose once it had struck. But most of the campers seemed to use a trident head with three points. I felt the points; they had been filed to needles.

"Dangerous," I said.

"Could be," Rocky nodded. "There's a lot of power in those rubber cables. Couple of weeks ago a guy shot himself badly in the leg, and I've heard that fatal accidents are not impossible, although you'd have to be almost unbelievably careless to kill yourself. The main thing is to make sure the arrow is really hooked on the safety catch. If it's only halfway hooked, a sudden jolt could let the arrow go when you're not expecting it."

He showed me how to do it. When the arrow was jammed home correctly, the safety snapped into place with a satisfying loud click.

"Always make sure there's a click," he explained.

The Albatross made pretty good time, and we soon lost sight of the Calvi citadel. The sea was relatively smooth and windless, but there was a swell, and you could hear it, even above the motor, when it broke on the rocky coast. The shore line was a solid mass of jagged cliffs and rocks, with caves pounded into them here and there.

"You know how little I know about sailing," I said, "but I'd hate to take a boat in close to that shore."

"We don't go in Paladin," Rocky said. "We leave her in Girolata and go out in the dinghy."

"So every day the three of you go out with all this gear looking for an E-boat. Doesn't that look suspicious?"

"For one thing, we can't go every day. It's beginning the southwest wind season, and that roughs things up a lot. But, no, it wouldn't look suspicious, anyway. On the contrary, it'd look funny if we didn't. Everybody else here does the same thing."

"Looking for E-boats?"

"Fishing, pal, fishing."

"How do you know? They think you're fishing, too."

"We do, as a matter of fact. Saves on the food bill, and we can stand some saving. A two months' charter on a good boat costs more than a bag of peanuts."

"What does the boat set you back?" I asked.

"Six hundred a month," he said. "And of course there's gas and food, and I pay Kurt's way. But with you paying your own freight, and Alex, too—"

"That's dream girl, no doubt."

"And stop leering. Wait till you see her."

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After about an hour and a half Albatross turned into the cove of Girolata. It was a honey of a place, almost invisible from the sea. A jutting point, crowned by an old castle, just barely cut off the prevailing southwest winds. The little cove was bordered by a white beach, behind which stood a grove of eucalyptus trees.

"There are about eight houses and forty inhabitants," Rocky said. "It's really out of the world. No stores. You have to order food in advance from Calvi, and the Albatross brings it."

Four yachts were anchored in the cove, and there was hardly room for another.

"That's baby," Rocky pointed. I knew nothing about boats, but Paladin looked stout and trustworthy, black-hulled and single-masted.

"She's Breton-built," he said, "and in Brittany they make boats that can take it. You could sail her around the world."

"Not in two months," I said.

"Wait till we find that E-boat, pal. I'll have a boat so big that Paladin could be her dinghy. Speaking of dinghies, I don't see ours."

Albatross nosed up carefully to a rickety wooden wharf, and we were pushed ashore by a flood of campers. Rocky kept looking around for his dinghy.

"Oh," he said, "there's Alex. She's borrowed somebody else's dinghy. That means that Kurt is off somewhere in ours."

The girl knew how to row. She brought the tiny dinghy in smartly beside the dock.

Rocky said, "Alex, this is Bob. Bob, this is the real skipper, Alex Fielding. Don't let on you know her real name is Alexandrine."

She made a face at Rocky and then smiled at me. "Welcome. I hope you like garlic in your salads."

"Love dat garlic," I lied. It was the best I could do. All my life I'd read about girls with green eyes, and I'd never seen one. Not till now. But hers really were green, with a little gray in them. Her hair was brown, just brown, but the sun had done things to it. Her skin was as tanned as Rocky's, and her figure about ten thousand times better.

Rocky gave a wolf-whistle and laughed. "See?" he said.

"Stop it!" she said. It was a long time since I had seen a girl blush.

"Okay," Rocky said. "Where's Kurt?"

"Out by the point," she replied.

He frowned. "I thought we agreed not to go out alone."

"You know how he is. He couldn't stand losing a day. And somebody had to meet you."

"Oh, well. Let's get back to the ship."

As we rowed past the biggest yacht in the harbor, a man aboard her waved and shouted to us. "Welcome back! Come have a drink!"

"Fine!" Rocky shouted. "Love to. We'll be right over."

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I said to Rocky, "Moving in fancy circles, son. Cocktail parties and all."

"That's the Frenchman I told you about," Rocky explained. "The one who saved Kurt when he went overboard that time in Calvi. We're pretty palsy-walsy with him now."

"Quite a ship," I said.

"She's a beauty, Xanadu. Just the kind—"

I finished it for him: "That you're going to buy when you find the E-boat."

"Right," he chuckled.

We rowed over to Xanadu and they introduced me to her owner. His name was Du Bouleau, and he had a nice handshake and a nice smile, which got even nicer when it got around to Alex.

The others knew his boat, of course, but he showed me around. He was proud of her, and why not? She was Hollywood's dream yacht, bright with chrome, white paint, and shining varnish, and at least twice as big as Paladin.

On deck he had built big chests of mahogany that looked like expensive furniture, but when I opened them I saw they concealed his anchors, spare ropes, and pressure tanks that I guessed held his oil, water, gasoline, and whatnot. The yacht even had a small bar with a refrigerator, and Du Bouleau offered us our choice of drinks. We had brandy with ice water.

The talk was all boats and fishing, mostly over my head.

Rocky said to me, "Here's the old master of submarine fishing. He could hit sardines with a needle."

Du Bouleau grinned. "One exaggerates. I could talk all day about the fish I have missed." Then he turned to me. "So this is your first go at it? I envy you the thrill that will come when you shoot your first big fish. You will be blooded for life, for it is like no other sport in the world. Indeed, it is its own world. You are hunting another beast, in a strange jungle, through caves and behind rocks and in chasms where you cannot see the bottom."

Rocky asked him to show me his guns, and he got them from a mahogany case on deck. Except for one, powered by a steel spring, they were like Rocky's, except far better made and more expensive. One had double rubber cords for extra power. Another had longer cords working around pulleys.

"Yours are every bit as good," Du Bouleau said, "because most shots are at very short range. These merely carry the arrow a little farther. By the way, where is Kurt?"

"Out fishing," Alex said.

"Alone?" He seemed surprised.

"What's all this about being alone?" I asked. "Do you have to be chaperoned?"

Everybody laughed, and Du Bouleau explained: "It is not a bad idea." He told how he had shot an octopus, wounded it, gone down to

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get it too soon, and how the tentacles had held him. "I couldn't make it let go. If my man had not come down to help, it would have been my last hunt."

Alex shivered, and I felt like it.

Then they got talking about moray eels. Du Bouleau said, "It is the most vicious of all things in the sea here. It can be over two meters long, and as thick as your upper arm, with wicked teeth. It can move like lightning, and in the water you move rather slowly; thus it is difficult to defend yourself. Unlike most fish, they are vicious and will attack you. So if you see one—it looks like a large, gray serpent—go away! By all means, do not shoot. Unless you hit them exactly in back of the head or down their mouth, they will attack you ferociously. It is easy to bleed to death from their bite before you can be helped."

"I think I'll go out with an armed guard," I said.

"You're both terrible," Alex said. "What a way to introduce Bob to submarine fishing! You might say that morays are very rare—I've seen only one in a month—and that an octupus never attacks you, and that there aren't any sharks."

"Thanks," I grinned.

Du Bouleau smiled back. "Miss Fielding is right, and I apologize. But I think Mr. Tillson will not be easily frightened."

"Unless the law has changed him," Rocky said, standing up. "I'm sorry, lords and ladies all, but I've got work on the carburetor."

"Are you leaving soon?" Du Bouleau asked.

"Oh, no, not for a few days, anyway."

As we left, Alex said, "Why don't you come over for coffee after dinner?"

"Thank you," Du Bouleau said. "I shall. You're the first American I've met who makes French coffee properly."

Back on Paladin, Rocky went to work on the motor, I stowed my things away, and Alex began getting things ready for dinner. It grew dark, and still the German wasn't back. It was about eight thirty when Rocky cocked his head, then said to Alex, "You can go ahead with chow. I hear the outboard."

We went up on deck. The putt-putt was easy to hear, but I could see nothing. Then finally I saw a dim shape moving toward us against the starlight. The motor stopped and the dinghy sidled up to us. A young man jumped out and tied her up.

"And high time, my friend," Rocky said. "Next time you get leftovers."

"Gott im Himmel!" von Hellberg said. "Do you think of nothing except your stomachs? *Look!"*

In the faint light coming on deck from the cabin it was hard to see clearly. I made out a circle of metal, about a foot across.

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"What is it?" Rocky demanded.

Von Hellberg's voice, charged with excitement, went lower: "It is the shadow ring of my boat!"

We stood in the half darkness, without a word. Then Rocky said abruptly, "Let's go below."

Alex pulled together the little curtains covering the portholes.

"Are you sure?" Rocky said softly. His face was glowing.

"Absolutely," the German said. "Here is the swastika on it, and the maker's name—C. Plath, Hamburg. My boat had a Plath compass, exactly like this, a spherical one with a floating card and a shadow ring like this."

"What's a shadow ring?" I asked.

The German grinned at me. "My name's von Hellberg," he said, holding out his hand. It was the first time I'd shaken hands with a German, but the war was over a long time ago. Then he said, "It is a movable ring with a raised segment that you slide around to keep the sun glare off the compass face."

"Where was it?" Alex asked.

Von Hellberg pointed on the chart: "Here, about three hundred yards south of the Ile de Gargalo. The strange thing was that I had given up looking for the day, and was only trying to get some fish for dinner. A big *sard* hid in a crack, and when I went down to look for him I saw this wedged in the rocks. If I'd only had more time to look! I stayed until there was absolutely no light left."

"So we're really near it!" Alex said happily.

"Can't be far away," Rocky nodded, "but let's not spend the money yet. Don't forget that boat went down seven years ago, and a lot can happen to a wreck in that time. Storms, currents could have shifted her and carried her off into deep water."

Then Alex said, "I hate to sound womanly and prosaic, but there's still the small matter of dinner."

I don't remember what we ate. We had the compass ring propped up like an idol, and we studied the chart like Scripture.

"The prevailing winds," Rocky said, "are southwesterly. So that would make this corner, by the island, a natural collecting point. The waves would inch a wreck slowly along the coast until it got to the island. And there it might stick. Unless it worked its way out to sea—to here." The chart showed six hundred feet of water very near shore.

"Also," von Hellberg said, "don't forget that a southwesterly wind generates a weaker but still strong northeasterly current. So the ring might have come down—it's a light alloy and would travel more easily—from some place farther north."

"True," Rocky agreed. "But we're hot on the trail. It can't be long now!"

Alex made a lot of coffee, which was a good thing, because we felt a sudden bump against Paladin

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and a voice called out, "Ahoy, Paladin! Coffee time?"

We stuffed the chart under a mattress and put the compass ring in the book locker. Rocky went on deck to meet Du Bouleau.

Everybody shook hands, in the Continental way, and the Frenchman asked Kurt, "Any luck today?"

Von Hellberg improvised. "I shot a really big mullet, but he twisted loose from the trident."

Du Bouleau nodded. "That can happen with a trident. For really big fish I think the single point with the folding barb is better. It is more difficult to hit fish, but, once hit, there is no way they can escape."

It was an effort to talk about fish again, but we managed it. Or they did. About fish that got away, and fish that didn't. How they drove them to ground and lured them out.

I felt somebody patting my hand, and it was Alex. "Don't worry," she smiled. "Pretty soon you'll have a lot of lies to tell, yourself."

We had a brandy after the coffee. It was pleasant enough, but nobody felt sorry when Du Bouleau stood up.

"Enfin!" he said. "Now I must go fishing."

"At night?" I exclaimed, puzzled.

"You must try it some time," he nodded. "With a bright underwater light the fish are as if paralyzed. Also, you see fish by night that one never sees in the daytime. Of course, this is illegal." He shrugged.

"I'm going to try it sometime myself," Rocky said. "I've got a light that works pretty well under water."

After Du Bouleau left, Rocky wouldn't go to bed without one last toast: "To the Ile de Gargalo! To fame! To glory! To dough! To tomorrow!"

But tomorrow was against us.

By six A.M. the sea outside was rough, and even the cove was choppy.

There was no chance of going out. Even I could tell that no dinghy would be safe in that sea. Besides, as Rocky pointed out, the surf near the shore would be too dangerous to work in.

I decided I might as well learn something about the submarine gear, and I talked Alex into teaching me. She said Rocky knew more about it, but I argued that it wasn't every day I could get a general's secretary to check me out.

"You can swim, I suppose," she said.

"It'd be fun to learn again," I said.

We went overboard with full gear. The flippers were fun. They were big, paddlelike rubber things that fitted on your feet and almost doubled your speed. The breathing tube had a soft rubber end that fitted comfortably in your mouth. I had trouble with the mask. It

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kept clouding up from my breath, but Alex showed me how to stop that.

"'Tain't ladylike," she said. "but this is how." She spat on the inside of the glass, rubbed it around, rinsed it out with water. "For some reason, it won't cloud up now. A raw potato will do it, too, but you don't always have one handy."

The mask was wonderful, and I found out what they meant by another world. I could see as clearly under water as out. It was like looking into a department-store window full of fish, seaweed, rocks, and sand.

Looking into the water from the deck, I'd hardly seen a fish. With the mask, I saw hundreds. All of them tiny fugitives from a sardine can, but I could see that if a big one came along, it wouldn't be too hard to hit it. They let you get up close before they wiggled off.

We swam straight to the beach and I lay down on the sand.

"Hey," she said, "I thought this was a lesson."

"Have to get my wind back," I lied, trying to pant. Then I asked her, "How serious is Rocky about this treasure business, anyway?"

"Pretty serious, now," she said. "We all are. At first it was sort of a half joke. We never really thought we'd find it. But there's something about looking at the bottom of the sea that gets you. It's so strange and secret. You begin to think that anything is possible there."

She flipped a pebble into the water, and went on, "Frankly, the tension's been building up a lot lately. Rocky's charter runs out in less than two weeks, you know, and of course we'll have to go back to Germany. There's no telling when we'd get a chance to come back."

"Von Hellberg found the compass ring in the nick of time," I said.

"In a way," she nodded, "but in a way it makes the pressure even worse. We haven't located the boat yet, and there's no telling how long it may take."

I watched a submarine fisher working along the shore of the cove, his breathing tube looking like a tiny periscope. The cove was sheltered enough to make the slight surf harmless.

"Seems funny to me," I remarked, "that von Hellberg doesn't know more exactly where his boat went down."

"I thought so too, at first. But, as he says, the coast looks pretty much the same around here. And he wasn't paying much attention to navigation. The water's so clear you can see any dangers. Then, when the plane came, he was too busy fighting back to take any bearings."

The fisher took off his mask, and bowed to Alex. He was well built, and had the kind of mustache all Frenchmen are supposed to have.

"Friend of yours?" I asked her.

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"No, but it's not his fault. He was camping in the pine grove at Calvi when we were there. Then he came here. I guess he doesn't speak any English. All he does is bow. Anyway, he's awfully handsome, isn't he?"

"Beautiful," I said, trying to be polite.

She sighed. "Wouldn't it be wonderful to find that E-boat?"

"Make a fine wedding present," I said. "One E-boat, with contents."

She laughed out loud. "My, you're subtle, but it's not like that with Rocky and me. Now let's get back into the water and at that gun."

She showed me how to cock the gun, holding the butt against my abdomen, and she scolded when I forgot to put on the safety catch a couple of times. I swam around shooting at little patches of seaweed. The gun was pretty accurate, and before long I was hitting an area, say a foot square, three times out of five.

We swam back to Paladin, shooing away some swimmer who was hanging on to our swimming ladder, resting.

"You're not a bad pupil," she said.

"No homework?"

"Sure," she grinned. "You can peel potatoes for lunch."

Rocky said, "How about going ashore for lunch instead? Gives the cook a rest."

We went a little early, to have a drink first. The path was rocky and uneven, wandering up through a little fig grove.

Rocky dropped back beside me and said in a low voice so that von Hellberg wouldn't hear, "By the way, you probably wouldn't anyway, but don't say anything about Kurt's being German."

"How could I?" I replied. "All I know in French is *je vous aime.* But why? I thought you said the French let bygones by bygones."

"This is a little different," Rocky explained. "The guy who runs this restaurant was in the Corsican underground—the maquis. One time he was hiding out on his father's farm up in the hills, and some French stooge squealed to the Nazis. They raided the place. The son got away, but the old man wasn't fast enough. The SS got him, and later they killed him as a hostage. So the son doesn't like Germans."

"I don't blame him," I said, "but it's got nothing to do with Kurt personally, has it?"

"Of course not. But, well, it just makes things easier if it never comes up, that's all."

The restaurant didn't look like much. It had a lot of local color, which means it hadn't been cleaned lately, but it turned out to be a pleasant place. The *patron* gave us big smiles. He didn't look like a man nursing a grudge.

An unshaven but friendly old character came along and insisted

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on talking to us because we were American and he had an aunt in Hoboken. Then a couple of Englishmen came in. Rocky knew them and got them over to our table, too. The taller Englishman was really a Scot, named Campbell, while the shorter was called Tupper.

"They're ichthyologists," Rocky explained.

"Fish again!" I groaned.

"They're different," Alex said. "They study fish, they don't hurt them."

"Oh, but we do," Campbell returned. "Even Englishmen have to eat, and fish helps out the budget."

"Don't the Latin names stick in your throat?" she asked.

"But each man kills the thing he loves," Campbell quoted. It turned out they were camping, of all places, up in the abandoned castle.

"It's a roof," Tupper explained. "A bit better than the beach. More sheltered for our work. An old chappie here has the key, and said my goodness yes, stay as long as you like."

The castle looked pretty impressive, and I said I'd like to see it. "Come up after lunch," Campbell invited.

Even lunch didn't stop the fish talk, for the main dish was mullet, and Campbell explained that there were lots of different kinds of mullet.

"In America," he said, "you grind up one of the inferior *Mugilidae* for fertilizer, I believe. The mullet has always been a delicacy. The one you usually get here is *Mullus barbatus*."

Latin names or no, the mullet was fine. It had been cut crosswise into thin steaks, then French-fried. We ate it with our fingers, dipping it into a kind of tartar sauce.

After lunch we climbed up a steep, dusty path to the castle. A few of the rooms were in fairly good shape, and the two men had taken over one of them. They had bedrolls and pneumatic mattresses on the floor, along with some books on ichthyology and a pair of submarine guns, with all the paraphernalia.

From the very top of the castle the view was superb. The promontory jutted out into the blue sea, whipped now into frothy white streaks by the wind. Fading into the distance on both sides were great rocky cliffs and little detached islands.

"With binoculars," Campbell remarked, "you can sometimes see all the way to the Iles Sanguinaires near Ajaccio. I always liked that name—the Bloody Islands. We lost a ship on one of them during the war." He had been in Corsica with the Royal Navy; he and von Hellberg hashed over naval stories as if they had been the best of friends.

When we got back at the dock, the French guy with the mustache who had bowed at Alex was fishing. Or at least pretending to. The water looked too shallow to me.

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He watched us climb into the dinghy and bowed again.

"I ought to have a long talk with Alphonse here," I said.

"Don't bother," Alex smiled. "He wouldn't understand what you were saying."

"Oh, yes, he would," I said.

"Forget it, Galahad," she laughed, "and don't forget you agreed to work on the potatoes."

I peeled them, too. It was nice watching her work in the galley. It was like a dehydrated kitchen, with a tiny refrigerator working off kerosene, tiny cupboards, a tiny sink, and a tiny gas stove.

"How does the stove work?" I asked her. "Kerosene? Alcohol?"

"No, butane gas. It comes in kind of a steel bottle. Here." Under the sink she pointed to a squat blue-metal cylinder. "You can get refills almost anywhere in France, and a bottle lasts about six weeks. It works just like city gas."

Last night there'd been too much excitement to pay any attention to food, but this time I noticed that Alex was a fine cook. The *escalope* of veal was exactly right, and the salad made me think maybe I was wrong about garlic.

We turned in early. The wind had fallen with the sun, but they said that didn't necessarily mean anything about tomorrow's weather.

"Pray for weather," Rocky said. "Maybe four husky prayers will help."

For once in my life I didn't mind getting up at 5:30. I was as treasure-hungry as they were, by now. The sea was calm, except for a slight swell. Rocky was on top of the world.

"It'll probably make up a little beginning around ten," he said, "but it won't be much. Let's take off!"

"I wish I could go," Alex mourned.

"You're not going?" I asked.

She smiled. "Thanks for the look on your face, but no. There's not room in the dinghy for more than three, so you big, brave men are going. I'll keep the gasplate burning."

With all our gear aboard, the dinghy barely floated. Besides three guns, three pairs of masks, flippers, and tubes, there were towels, cigarettes, extra gas, water, a life-preserver cushion, and the oars. Plus a box lunch.

"We eat there," Rocky said. "Wastes too much time to come back here."

The motor started on the second pull and we headed for sea. Du Bouleau's launch came in as we went out, and he waved at us, holding up a string of beautiful fish. He shouted something to us, but we couldn't make it out over the motor noise, and we just waved back.

"Have to try that night fishing some time," Rocky said into my ear.

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It took nearly an hour to get around Pointe Rossa, and von Hellberg guided us to the spot where he'd found the compass ring. It was so near the shore that the cliff shut out the sun, which wasn't very high yet. We anchored the dinghy with her stern only a few yards from shore. Then we put on our gear.

"Taking your guns?" I asked.

Rocky said, "We won't, not until late afternoon, when we'll get some fish to eat. But you might as well take yours and get used to it."

He kissed his mask before he slipped it on. "Bring Daddy good luck," he said to it. He assigned different search areas for each of us and we went overboard.

The underwater world here was fantastically beautiful. It was, in a way, like flying. A kick of my flippers sent me floating over chasms and valleys and mountains, all under water. Off on the "horizon" I could see the half-bodies of von Hellberg and Rocky swimming away; their upper bodies were out of water and invisible.

Looking seaward, I could see what they meant by the steep coast of Corsica. Within not more than one hundred yards or so, the bottom dropped away to a deep blue nothingness. If the E-boat had been pushed out there . . .

The water was like blue air, and there were plenty of fish. I found the big ones weren't as careless or lazy as they looked, which was probably why they grew to be big. The little ones were more reckless, as if they knew I wasn't after them.

I got on the trail of a big gray fish. He sidled away from me, slowly, and when I followed, he went into a crack in the rock. I hid behind another rock and watched. Every so often he stuck his nose out to look around, and each time his body came a little farther out.

When he wasn't watching, I swam over just above his rock and waited. The next time he nosed out I let him have it, with my harpoon not three feet away from him. It caught him near the tail, and although he writhed and flapped around, he couldn't get loose. I was so afraid of losing him that I swam to the dinghy with him still on the arrow and pulled him off there.

They were right. It was a tremendous, and different kind of thrill. I'd hunted before—quail, deer, and Germans—but it was never like this.

Then I went back to treasure-hunting, feeling a little guilty over wasting so much time on my fish. I floated and paddled all over my area, from the foot of the cliff all the way out to where the bottom shelved off to nothing. It would have been boring if the sea-bottom were not so fascinating in itself.

Something touched me on the shoulder, and it was Rocky, motioning me toward the shore. I hadn't heard him or seen him as he swam up to me. I followed him,

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and we crawled out on a flat rock. Von Hellberg was already there.

"Gets cold after a while, doesn't it?" Rocky said. "We have to rest every once in a while and warm up."

The hot sunlight and a cigarette felt good. Then we went back into the water. It went like that all day, with a longer break for lunch.

About four o'clock we moved the dinghy north and started in on a new area. But by 5:30 Rocky called it quits. We'd found nothing, of course.

"Time for marketing now," Rocky said. They told me my fish was a *sard,* and fine eating, but not enough for four. This time we all took our guns and spread out as before—Rocky on the far left, then von Hellberg, then me.

The fish seemed to be more approachable around late afternoon, and I got a big green-and-brown one. Even allowing for magnification—and I found the mask magnified things a lot—he looked like a three-pounder at least. I thought that if the others did as well, or half as well, we'd have plenty of fish.

So I swam back to the dinghy. Von Hellberg was already there, with two more *sards.* He told me regretfully that my green-and-brown fish, while pretty, made poor eating. Sadly, I threw it overboard.

The sun was almost down. "I wish Rocky would call it a day," von Hellberg said. "I am cold."

We could see Rocky floating off in his area. We wrapped towels around us, but they were soggy and not much help. Finally I suggested, "Let's row over to him. Maybe he doesn't know we've got enough."

Von Hellberg rowed up slowly, so as not to scare away any fish that Rocky might be stalking. He was floating without moving, just off the mouth of a cave that went into the cliff. There was a rock that looked something like a turtle, and he was apparently watching a fish under it.

"Gott!" It was von Hellberg, pointing.

Rocky's gun floated, snout barely out of water, a few yards from him, as if anchored. And, in a way, it was anchored.

The trident arrow had not gone all the way through his abdomen, but it had gone far enough.

The next few hours were horrible. Somehow we got his body into the dinghy. By instinct, we tried not to disturb it any more than we had to. We left the arrow where it was, still tied to the string that ran to his gun. On the wire around his wrist he had strung a small mullet. I threw it overboard.

The trip back to Paladin in the twilight was awful. Then there was the stunned, horrified, unbelieving look on Alex's face. We put the body on the stern, covered with canvas. Then we sat together, dumb and paralyzed.

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"But how could he have done it?" von Hellberg said. "He was always so careful."

I nodded gloomily, remembering how Rocky had instructed me so carefully how to hook the arrow firmly on the safety catch. Remembering how he had said you'd have to be almost unbelievably careless to kill yourself with one of the guns.

Yet somehow he had done it. Rocky the careful. Rocky the experienced. Rocky the old hunter.

It didn't make sense, but there was no other answer. None.

I picked up one of the other guns, idly. I had never thought much before about "unbelievably careless," but now I saw what Rocky had meant.

With the arrow in place, the gun was almost four feet long. Alex and von Hellberg watched, wordlessly, while I tried to hold the gun in such a position that I could shoot myself in the abdomen.

It was nearly impossible. For one thing, the trigger was so far away that I couldn't even reach it.

Von Hellberg shook his head. "It couldn't have happened that way," he said.

"How else, then?" I snapped.

"He must have dropped the gun," the German said. "Sometimes you do, when hunting. It could have fallen against a rock, loaded, and the jar could have set it off, if the safety wasn't on solidly. Like this."

He took the gun from me and loaded the gun with careful carelessness, so that although the arrow seemed in place, the safety had not clicked home. He pointed the gun over the side and then dropped it on the deck. The shock did the trick. The half-caught arrow shot over the side and fell into the water.

We stared at the ripples it made as von Hellberg somberly pulled back the arrow by its string.

"There couldn't be any other way," he said.

"It's asking a lot of coincidence," I said. "Only once in a million times would Rocky have been so careless about cocking it. And only once in a million times would he have dropped the gun. And both of them happened."

Alex's eyes were bright with tears. "Oh, I can't stand it!" she whispered. "I know nothing can hurt him now, but I can't stand the thought of the harpoon still in him. It seems so horrible."

Von Hellberg and I looked at each other, and he nodded. Somehow it seemed up to me to do it. I unfolded the canvas and took hold of the harpoon. I was glad it was dark.

I had to pull hard to get it out, and I found myself whispering, "Sorry, fellow." Finally it came loose, and I dipped it into the sea to clean it off.

Alex went below. The German and I sat staring at the trident.

"And that," he said bitterly, "was

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the new point he was so eager to buy."

Then something dawned on me. "It's *not* the new point!" I exclaimed. "He didn't put a new one on this morning. He was too excited."

Von Hellberg shook his head. "It must be. The only trident head he had before was bent and twisted, with the middle prong broken off. This one is brand-new."

"I don't care," I said. "I saw him buy the new ones—three of them—and they're still in the cabin."

"Just a minute." It was Alex; she had been listening. We heard the rustle of paper, and then she came on deck, her face strained, her eyes tormented, holding out the opened parcel.

The three new points were there.

"I still can't believe it," von Hellberg said at last.

"Neither can I," Alex said brokenly, "but there's nothing else to believe."

"It could have been an accident," the German said.

"When a guy gets killed just as he's about to lay his hands on a treasure, that's no accident," I pointed out. Then, maybe because I'm a lawyer, I said, "We've got to tell the police."

"And cable the Air Force at Wiesbaden," Alex added. "There's a phone in that restaurant. But who speaks French?"

None of us did, not well enough to cope with a French telephone. At last we had to get Du Bouleau to help us. He was stunned. And even for him it took an hour to get a message to the Préfecture in Ajaccio, which finally said an inspector would be down tomorrow.

Du Bouleau had almost as hard a time getting an uncomprehending operator in Ajaccio to spell out properly the cable to Wiesbaden. Alex had addressed it to her general, and it said: "MAJOR JAMES ROCKFORD DEAD IN GIROLATA NEAR CALVI CORSICA STOP BELIEVE MURDER STOP FRENCH POLICE INVESTIGATING."

By three o'clock the next afternoon the French inspector had still not arrived. As Alex pointed out, Girolata is a tough place to get to in a hurry. Not long after that, we heard a motor in the sky and Alex said, "Maybe that's him. Do French police have planes?"

I saw the plane coming toward us and I said, "That's an Air Force C-45. They must have left Wiesbaden a minute after they got that cable."

"The Air Force hasn't quite gone to pieces since you left," she said. And smiled. It was the first smile any of us had had since yesterday, and it made us all feel better.

The C-45 buzzed the cove and took off north toward Calvi.

"Too bad," von Hellberg said.

"Don't worry, pal," I assured him. "The Air Force will buy a boat, if they have to."

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The French inspector arrived about four and promptly fell afoul of the language difficulty. We got Du Bouleau to the rescue again. The inspector apologized for being so late, but said that on this case there had to be liaison work between Ajaccio, Paris, and Wiesbaden, and it took time. He would not really handle the case himself. An American investigator was coming down, with a French liaison officer, by virtue of a French-American agreement in cases involving military personnel.

We told him the American plane had already come, and he exclaimed admiringly, *"Ah, ces Americains!"* He was plainly relieved that the case was not his baby. He took a few names and notes, but he was obviously marking time until the others arrived.

We were relieved, too. So far we had told nobody about the treasure angle. Of course, it would have to come out, but it seemed easier to tell it to an American.

The Albatross came in about five, and not much later a fast fishing boat swept into the cove with two passengers. I stood on the bow to wave at them, and they altered course to come alongside.

"It's Terry Hillman!" Alex exclaimed.

"Do you know everybody?" I asked.

"I've seen him at the officers' club in Wiesbaden. He's in the C.I.D."

Hillman was a husky character in civilian clothes. He introduced his companion, Heinemann, as the French lieutenant, an Alsatian whose German was as good as his French, though his English wasn't.

We shook hands, and Hillman said, "Too bad about Rocky."

He got down to business right away, and we told him how it had happened. When we finished, he thought for a moment.

"I'm over my head," he said at last. "I'm used to tracing bullets, but this arrow business is something new. Is there any chance of tracing the arrow?"

"I doubt it, von Hellberg said slowly. "It is a standard 'Champion' trident head. As you see, there are no numbers on it. Thousands of them are sold in France. Probably half the campers in Corsica have the same kind."

"And the same for the arrow shaft itself, I suppose."

"Yes."

Hillman thought some more, and finally said, "I still don't get it. You say it's impossible to trace either the head or the arrow shaft. Then why did the murderer bother changing heads?"

"The only possible reason," I said, "was that he wanted to make it look like an accident. I think maybe you forget one thing, Hillman. These arrows aren't like the kind you use in archery. These are attached to the gun by a piece of string. If Rocky had been found with his own arrow still loaded in

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his own gun, and a second arrow in him, it would be obviously murder."

Hillman grunted assent. "How would he go about changing them?" he asked.

I got a gun and demonstrated.

"There are two ways," I explained. "Remember that Rocky is dead now, with the killer's own arrow in him. Theoretically, it would have been possible for him to have untied Rocky's string and retied it to his own—the killer's arrow. But I doubt whether he did it that way. It would take too long. As you can see, the knots are pretty small and tight, and the killer would be working under pressure. But there's an easier way."

"What's that?" Hillman asked. He was watching closely.

"It would be a lot easier just to change the points. They're made for that; some hunters even carry different kinds of points for different kinds of fish, and they're quickly interchangeable."

I unscrewed the trident point.

"You see that the end of the arrow shaft is a male thread, while the inside of the head is a female thread. It would be no trick at all, with Rocky dead, for the killer merely to unscrew his own shaft from the head in the body, and then, after taking Rocky's point off, screwing Rocky's shaft on. The string would still be tied to it, and it would look as if Rocky had shot himself."

Von Hellberg was nodding. "It could be that way," he said.

"Let's try it another way," Hillman said. "Let's say some other fisherman shot him by mistake, then got panicky and swapped the points, hoping it would look as if Rocky had been careless with the safety."

All of us shook our heads. "There was nobody else fishing in the area," I said. "That's for sure."

I glanced at Alex and von Hellberg, and they nodded. Then we all told him about the treasure.

He listened carefully, asking no questions until we'd finished. Then he nodded slowly and said, "You win. It must be murder. You can't ask too much of coincidence. The murderer must have been somebody who knew about the treasure, too, and was trying to cut down competition the hard way." He looked at all of us. "So just you three knew about it?"

It was not a pleasant question.

"Obviously, we were wrong," I said.

Hillman turned to von Hellberg. "Didn't you say that an SS man got away from the boat with you? He'd know about it too."

"His unit was sent to the Russian front," the German replied, "and all were killed or captured. It is impossible that he could come back here."

"You came back," Hillman said.

Von Hellberg flushed. "That is true," he admitted. "I did not mean

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that he might not, by some miracle, have escaped death in Russia and come back to Corsica. I meant that he would not have had the slightest idea about where we were sunk. He was a soldier, not a sailor. He knew nothing of charts and navigation. He would know simply that it was somewhere on the west coast of Corsica, south of Calvi."

"You didn't know much more."

"I beg your pardon," the German said stiffly. "I was the captain, I did my own navigation. I was at the helm most of the time."

"Yet it has taken you six weeks to find the spot. If this is it."

Hillman changed the subject. "This swapping of arrow points," he said. "How could the killer have calmly risked that?"

"It wasn't much of a risk," I said. "Von Hellberg and I had our faces down, hunting fish."

"But there'd have been *two* heads," Hillman objected.

"There need be only one," von Hellberg said stonily. "He would have held Rocky under water while he worked."

Hillman nodded gloomily. "It must have been someone watching him very closely, picking exactly the right time, when you and this German were in exactly the right place . . ."

"But there was no one else around," I insisted.

There was you and there was von Hellberg," Hillman said curtly, "von Hellberg being nearer." Then, not giving us time to react to this, he went on, "Besides, who said it has to be a swimmer? An arrow will fly through air too I suppose. You say you were practically touching the shore. Why couldn't somebody standing on shore have shot him?"

"Won't work," I said. "The shore there is so steep that only a fly could get anywhere near the water. And it's almost inconceivable that anybody on shore could hit him fatally the first time. Without a cry from Rocky."

"I thought," Hillman countered, "that you couldn't hear with those mask straps over your ears?"

"That's so," I admitted. "But look what the murderer would have to do, according to your theory. First, get to the water, which I still say is impossible from the landslide. Then kill Rocky. Then get into the water himself. Then change arrowheads. Then climb out of the water, up impossible cliffs, and make his getaway. All before one of us happened to look up. It's impossible."

"Everything's impossible," Hillman exclaimed with bitter irony. "It's impossible that it was an accident. It's impossible that anybody shot him from the land. It's impossible that a swimmer shot him, because there were no other swimmers. It must be impossible that Rocky's dead."

(*continued on page 99*)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HENRIETTE MCCLELLAND**

TITLE: ***The Perfect Secretary***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Walter had "woman trouble." But he also had Henry—a perfect secretary and a friend. And he knew Henry would do anything for his friendly employer . . .*

ONE THING WAS CERTAIN, WALTER thought, looking into the office adjoining his own, there was going to be a new private secretary in The Rockridge Mail Order Company before the end of the month—and this time it certainly wouldn't be anyone like Henry.

Walter poured a drink from the bottle of Scotch he kept in his desk, and considered Henry. If only eighteen months ago he had been able to stand up to Marion and pick his own secretary! Unfortunately, he had been so grateful that Marion was willing to forgive his latest escapade that he had been glad to agree that not only would his future secretaries be male, but that she could do the hiring. The day Marion called to say she was sending over the ideal applicant, Walter had expected the worst; but he was totally unprepared for the dapper young man with the mincing step who entered the office, smiling cheerfully.

"I'm Henry Hunt," he had said. "Call me Henry."

Taking an instant dislike to him, Walter had tried to discourage Henry. "You'll have to work hard here," he said.

"I'm prepared to, Mr. Trent," Henry replied, adjusting his glasses.

"You'll have to work late at times. Your wife may object."

"My wife understands that business comes before pleasure."

"At the end of the month, when the mail is especially heavy, you'll

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have to cart some of the large sacks of mail to the post office yourself," Walter said, eyeing Henry's neatly pressed blue suit. "It's dusty work."

"I have my own car, so that won't be any problem."

"Are you sure you want to work here? It's really very dull, and there's not much chance for advancement," Walter persisted.

"Some day I intend to own a mail-order business myself," Henry explained, "and I think I should learn the business from the ground up."

There was absolutely no reason not to hire Henry. He had all the qualifications, and a willing disposition besides.

"This is your office," Walter said, taking Henry into the room next to his.

"Um! These old loft buildings make wonderful offices, don't they?" Henry said, viewing the drafty room.

"Here's the washroom—we'll share this. The girls in the outer office have their own."

"Nice, nice," Henry chanted.

"And you may park in the rear area marked 'reserved'."

"How convenient! I can walk up the fire stairs right into my office."

"You could, or you can use the general elevator in the front, or—" Walter was tempted to be big-hearted and offer Henry the use of the self-service elevator which opened directly into his office. His father-in-law, who had suffered from a heart condition, had had it installed for himself when he was alive, but Walter had found it a blessing. By using it he was free to come and go as he pleased, and he could entertain a lady now and then without causing gossip in the office. Walter decided against sharing his elevator. "I guess that's all there is to show you," he said.

"Thank you, Mr. Trent," Henry had replied, extending a diminutive hand with well manicured nails. "I know I'm going to enjoy working here. It's going to be just like working for a friend!"

Walter realized it was unreasonable of him to be irritated with Henry for considering him a friend. He seethed with annoyance each time Henry began a conversation with, "As one friend to another," or "As a friend might I suggest." Every time Henry used the word "friend," Walter felt the urge to fire him, although there certainly was no reason to do so. From the time Henry assumed the role of secretary, the wheels of progress and efficiency began to turn quickly.

Henry organized the files which his lovely predecessor had allowed to fall into a state of confusion; he brought the correspondence up to date; he tactfully soothed difficult old customers and encouraged new ones with winning letters. No longer did the girls in the outer office quibble among themselves, or take advantage of their "coffee breaks."

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After a cheerful "Good morning!" from Henry the sound of clicking typewriters and the whirling mimeograph machines replaced the wave of conversation and giggles that had been prevalent in the past.

Indeed, whatever Henry touched bore the mark of perfection. When he handed Walter a letter to sign, it was frequently quite different from the one Walter had dictated. "I knew what you meant to say, Mr. Trent," Henry would murmur softly. "It's just that you have so much on your mind." And when Walter would grudgingly agree that this was exactly what he had meant to say, Henry would break into a benevolent smile. "We're so much alike, Mr. Trent, I can read your mind. That's why we're such good friends."

Eventually Walter realized that Henry not only did his own work to perfection, but had assumed most of Walter's duties—leaving him free for his favorite sport, the pursuit of happiness. Henry never complained about hauling the extra mail, nor did he object to a desk heaped high with enough work to occupy his entire evening; and, best of all, he was the soul of discretion. When Walter wanted an evening to himself he would call home, leave word he was working late, and feel confident Henry would give the correct answers to Marion, should she call to check on him. If Walter expected a visitor, or wanted to catch forty winks, all he had to say was, "Henry, I'm going to be in conference." He would shut the heavy door between the two offices and know without doubt that Henry would never invade his privacy.

Walter poured a second drink for himself and studied Henry, who was working on a letter to a disgruntled customer. If Henry had never been hired, Walter wouldn't have become involved with Lynn. It had occurred so naturally. Late one afternoon when Henry's desk was piled with work, Walter had discerned a troubled look in the young man's eyes.

"It's just that I promised to bring my wife a pair of stockings," he said in answer to Walter's curiosity. "She's going out tonight." He fingered the package on his desk.

"I'll drop them off," Walter said.

"Oh, no," Henry protested. "You're a busy man, Mr. Trent."

"Nonsense," Walter insisted. "I'll be glad to."

When Walter rang the doorbell of Henry's house he expected to see a female version of Henry. He was aware that the girls in the office considered Henry "cute," "sweet," "a darling," but he had no idea of Henry's powers with women until the door opened and a slim blonde with big gray eyes stood smiling at him.

"Henry called to say you were coming," she said huskily. "I'm Lynn."

From that time on Walter kept Henry busy several evenings a

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week, and he and Lynn plunged into a delightful love affair which, now that he had begun to tire of her, he was finding difficult to terminate. Too late he realized that in this adorable creature beat a heart of pure greed, and, even worse, she played her little game for keeps. He suddenly saw (he told her) how much harm he was doing her. If they parted now, they could always look back on this time as the most precious in their lives.

"Walter, Yummy," she said thoughtfully, "your wife doesn't appreciate you. She doesn't realize all you've done for her."

Walter nodded. Pride forbade him telling her that the business belonged to Marion and a doddering old uncle of hers in Jersey, and that her grandfather, who had started it, had taken legal precautions to see that it stayed in the family.

"You should divorce her, Yummy," Lynn said.

Divorce! He'd be out job-hunting the next day. "I couldn't," he said. "She has so little—I can't leave her."

"She's jealous and demanding and mercenary. You told me so yourself."

"We all have faults, Lynn. Perhaps I've been harsh on her."

"Walter!" Lynn cried sharply. "Have you been lying to me all this time? Don't you really love me?"

"Lynn, honey!" Walte drew her to him. "Of course I love you. Only, Marion wouldn't understand—"

"Maybe she would if *I* talked with her. I could explain—"

"Don't you dare!" Walter cried. Desparately he tried to take control of the situation. "You're too fine a person to want to hurt Henry," he insisted. "You must have loved him when you married him."

"Henry lied to me," she said, pouting. "He told me that some day I'd be a wealthy woman if I married him. And here he is, a secretary!"

Walter concealed his amusement over Henry's line of persuasion. "Henry's doing very well," he said loyally. "In fact, he's due for a raise soon."

"Is he? Can you believe it, I don't even know what Henry earns? He never tells me anything. He says I can't understand finances. It's all too complicated for me."

For a fleeting moment Walter appreciated Henry's home life. "Henry's a fine young man," Walter began. "He's punctual and efficient." Walter searched for other complimentary adjectives, but found himself at a loss. "And you should stay with him, Lynn. He needs you." He paced the floor while Lynn lay back, observing him.

"Walter," she said, "I don't like this. I'm going to talk to Marion."

"Lynn," he pleaded, "don't!" He knew he was treading on dangerous ground. "Perhaps I can work something out."

"I'm sure you can, Yummy," she said.

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Walter soon came to realize that he couldn't stall Lynn much longer. She had started to call the office, and threatened to call his home. Walter poured another drink. "Obnoxious couple," he muttered to himself a little drunkenly.

Each morning he would hope to hear that Henry's house had burned to the ground during the night, with both occupants charred beyond recognition. Or perhaps an automobile accident, and both dead before the ambulance arrived.

He played with the idea of confessing all to Marion, but he knew she had meant it last time when she said it was the last time.

"What would Henry say if I told him?" he wondered. Ugly as the scene would be, he knew he had to confess all to Henry. He would urge Henry to chastise his wife, then to forgive her and send in his resignation. He would give Henry wonderful references—anything to make him leave and get Walter out of the clutches of Lynn.

Walter gulped his drink and rang the buzzer. Henry grabbed his pad and pencil and dashed in.

"Sit down, Henry," Walter said. "I've got to talk to you." He hunted for words. "I've got a friend who has a problem."

"That's too bad, Mr. Trent."

"Yes. You see he's, ahh, he's involved with a woman—ahh, the wife of a friend of his."

"How awful!" Henry said softly, shaking his head.

"He shouldn't have done it, I know. He's sorry now. It was a terrible mistake, but those things do happen."

Henry sucked his lower lips thoughtfully.

"And now this woman is threatening to make trouble. She wants to explain the affair to his wife in hopes of an easy divorce. She's even willing to create a public scandal! You can understand, can't you?"

"I certainly can," Henry agreed. "Wives take a dim view of such proceedings."

"Men can understand and forgive these things, but women can't. And this wife in particular could never understand. Now the woman has begun to bother my friend at his office. She's plaguing him and making him a nervous wreck. She's demanding and self-centered, and has no regard for the sanctity of the home." Walter leaned forward and looked earnestly at Henry. "Now I'm asking you, Henry, as a friend, what should this man do?"

Henry slipped off his glasses and covered his eyes. "I'm sure your friend has considered the answer," he said. "The woman's got to go."

"What do you mean?" Walter demanded.

"Your friend's wife would never forgive him," Henry said coolly. "The woman in question has proved herself immoral and untrustworthy. Some day she'll write a letter, or pay a visit, and get her revenge. A woman spurned, you

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know, is better off dead for all concerned."

Walter had to admit that he had wished Lynn dead. He could never feel safe while she was able to get in touch with Marion. "Wait a second, Henry," he said, "my friend—he's very fastidious. He wouldn't want any blood—no incriminating evidence."

"That could be arranged," Henry said. "If by some chance your friend should work in a place like this, he could invite the woman to his office after hours. She never would be noticed going in the rear entrance. He could give her a drink containing a sedative—" he paused, but Walter waved him on, "and if your friend is connected with a mail-order firm, he knows that at the end of the month there is extra mail, and extra mail sacks big enough to conceal a drugged woman. She could be carried out without raising any suspicion."

"Umm," Walter murmured thoughtfully.

"By this time it would be dark, and he could drive to the South End Bridge which is quite deserted, open the sack, and drop her into the river. Since she's alive her lungs would fill with water—so, death by drowning. The next morning the sack would be back at the office, and no one the wiser."

"No violence, no noise, no blood." Walter played with his glass. Henry—friendly little Henry, efficient little Henry—had supplied the best solution to the problem. He instantly decided against confessing the name of the woman and began to prepare Henry for a scene he knew to be inevitable.

"I think," he began, "that there's hardly a man who wouldn't prefer to have his wife dead rather than unfaithful. It does something to a man's pride. He'd rather be penniless, a failure, than to know he'd been deceived. It's humiliating," he continued, watching Henry nod agreement. "Tell me," he added after a pause, "do you think you could get hold of a sedative?"

"I'm sure I could, Mr. Trent."

Walter reached for his calendar. "The twenty-eighth," he said. "The mail is heavy then." He hesitated. How far could he push this man? But he had to have Henry's cooperation. "Would you take care of the mail that night? It would mean a lot to me. There will be a good bonus for you."

"Thank you, Mr. Trent. Yes, I'll take care of the mail for you."

"All the mail?" he asked.

"All the mail, Mr. Trent."

"Thank you, Henry. And—oh, you can take the rest of the afternoon off if you'd like."

"No, Mr. Trent. I wouldn't presume on our friendship that way. There's a lot of important work to do today." Picking up his pad and pencil, Henry returned to his office.

On the afternoon of the twenty-eighth Walter discovered a bottle of

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pills in the washroom. "They dissolve easily," Henry assured him. "They take effect in about twenty minutes."

"Henry," Walter said. "I'm going into conference about six o'clock. Perhaps you'd better go to supper at five thirty. When you come back you can finish your business and pick up the mail—all the mail, Henry. I'll leave my mail in a sack by the elevator. Clear? And Henry," he added, "after it has been delivered I want to see you. I'll be waiting here." Walter extended his hand. "Henry," he said, "you're a real friend."

"Thank you, Mr. Trent," Henry said, smiling. "I can't tell you what your friendship means to me."

Walter called his home to say he'd be working late and learned from the maid, who was about to go out, that Marion had gone to bed with a migraine headache, and had given the girl the evening off. Then he called Lynn and asked her to meet him in his office.

He paced the floor anxiously, waiting for her to arrive. He heard the girls in the outer office call good night to Henry; he watched Henry depart by the fire stairs for an early supper at the diner; and finally, with a throb of excitement, he recognized Lynn bustling across the empty lot toward the rear entrance of the office building, her blonde hair tumbling over her shapely shoulders.

"All our worries are over, honey," he said, as she stepped off the elevator. "Marion has agreed to a divorce."

"Walter! Yummy! I knew you'd find a way!" She threw her arms around him.

"Let's celebrate, honey," he said, kissing her. "I'll fix us a drink."

He handed her the glass which contained the pill. "Bottoms up"—and he was relieved to see her drain the glass without suspicion.

"I'll fix another one," he said, "and you can sit here while I finish up some odds and ends. Then we'll go out on the town."

"You're wonderful," she cried. "I knew you'd think of something. What did you tell her, Yummy? Was she very mad at poor you?"

"I'll tell you all about it later," he said, sitting down at his desk. "Stretch out on the couch, and if you get tired take a snooze."

"Tired! I'm so excited I could die!" she said. "I'll just watch you from over here."

He bent over some papers, keeping an eye on his watch. Eventually he heard her yawn. "Why I *am* sleepy," Lynn complained. "I'll close my eyes a moment, if you don't mind." When he heard her breathing heavily, Walter curled her up, pushed her into a mail sack, tied it securely, washed the glasses carefully, and left to have dinner at his club.

"You're late," one of his friends called from the bar. "Where've you been?"

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"I went home. Marion had one of her migraines, so I didn't disturb her." That was it—account for every minute.

"We're getting up a game of cards after dinner."

"Not tonight. I've got work to do, back at the office."

"I thought your secretary attended to that—the one you call the cherub in horn rims."

"I gave him the evening off." The devilish desire to implicate Henry rose irresistibly. "Yes, Henry wanted to take his wife out. She met him at the office. They left together, happy couple."

"Well, here's to the happy couple."

Later at the office, Walter waited for Henry. He felt curious, but not uneasy. No matter how upset or vengeful Henry might feel, he could not possibly report the deed to the police or to Marion without implicating himself. In any event, he reflected happily, this undoubtedly would be his last encounter with Henry. In a few days someone else would be sitting in the drafty room and taking dictation.

Before long the door opened, and Henry entered.

"Henry," Walter said coldly. "I want you to know I told everyone at the club you and Lynn were together tonight."

"I knew you would," Henry said briskly. He pulled a cigar out of his pocket and casually bit off the end.

"But don't let's think too badly of her. I hold myself to blame too."

"Perhaps you do," Walter said, "but she was an impossible woman. She was determined to ruin me."

"She was determined to ruin me!" Henry said. "She was willing to go into court and cause a public scandal, just as you said, Mr. Trent. And she was willing to turn the whole business over to you. Why, she even wanted me to divorce Lynn!"

"Henry! What are you talking about?"

"You know, Mr. Trent. You described the whole affair so well last week. As soon as you started to talk about your friend I realized you knew all about us. It was wrong from the start. She hired me to check on you, and I couldn't do that to a friend, could I? She kept coming up here, every time I worked late, and to keep her happy I—well—well, it's just as you said the other day, those things do happen. But I guess it was my fault too. I can be pretty friendly, you know."

"Henry!" The perspiration ran down Walter's face. "Are you telling me you killed *Marion* tonight?"

"You knew, Mr. Trent. You told me you'd rather have your wife dead than unfaithful."

"You don't know it," Walter gasped, "but this business belonged to Marion and a senile old uncle of hers."

"I know, Mr. Trent. He's my second cousin, and I'm his only

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heir. That's why Marion wrote to me and begged me to take this job. She was one of those people who presumed on her relatives and friends. It never pays, does it?"

"That mail sack I left by the elevator—what did you do with it?" Walter whispered.

"I put it in your car." Henry smiled benevolently. "After all, it's going to be my business now, and since there's an opening for a secretary I thought you could take care of the mail in the future. In fact," he gave Walter a broad wink and glanced at his watch, "I'd suggest, as a friend, that you attend to that mail within the next ten minutes. It might cause quite a stir if—" He paused. "And Walter," Henry added, "I'd like you to know this won't affect our friendship—not one bit!"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **RICK RUBIN**

TITLE: ***When the Fog Is Right***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *An unusual story about a poor farm family that harvested a "cash crop" every year, and how an 18-year-old boy became a man . . .*

TOM BRONSON KNOWS THAT IT IS his father who is shaking him awake and that it is the middle of the night. His first look is not toward his father but through the single window at the end of the attic—out through the trees and across the valley. It is foggy! A thick, moist, middle-of-winter fog shrouds the valley in ghostly blankness, obscuring everything beyond the tree nearest the window.

Having seen the fog, Tom looks up at his father, knowing already what he is being awakened for. He sees a lanky man in a gray shirt and rough wool pants, his straight brown hair hanging uncombed over his brow. He sees the familiar intense brown eyes, the thin jutting nose and straight mouth. Whiskers patch the weather-lined cheeks.

"We're going tonight," his father says.

Tom throws his legs over the side of the bed and gropes for his socks and boots and blue jeans.

"Dress warm," his father says.

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" Tom says. "I could of stayed up."

"Hard to tell when it'll be, son. A man just has to wait and see. I wasn't sure the fog would lie right."

His father moves off to wake Phil, Tom's older brother. Tom puts on his clothes as fast as he can, lacing his boots and pulling on his sweater. He combs his hair with his fingers, then hunts the rack against the wall for his mackinaw. At the other end of the attic he hears grunts as his father awakens Phil, then sounds of Phil dressing and his father clumping down the stairs.

"Wait for me," he hears Phil whisper, but Tom heads for the stairs and hurries down.

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In the kitchen the stove is glowing, a pot of coffee bubbling and steaming; biscuits are in the oven, eggs and bacon and pancakes on top of the stove. His mother works her steady way from pot to oven to pans, tending this, turning that. She is a lumpy, solid woman, her face work-tired in the glare from the wood stove. "Sit down," she says. "Food in a minute."

"What time is it?" Tom says.

"About two thirty," his father answers from the bedroom off the kitchen.

"Don't make so much noise," his mother says. "You'll wake the girls."

"I'm already awake," Lucille the oldest girl says, coming down the stairs from the second floor. She is buttoning up a wool shirt, wearing jeans and her boots. "Might as well not worry anyway. I'm coming along."

"The hell you are," his father says. "This ain't no work for a girl."

"Aw Pop, I'm sixteen. You took Tom since he was sixteen."

"Don't matter. Took him because he was a boy of sixteen. This ain't no work for a girl no matter what her age."

"Pop, I wanta come."

"You obey your old man," his mother says. "He says no girls going, then no girls are going."

"Damn it, I wish I was a boy."

"Lucille Bronson, you quit your swearing," his mother says.

Lucille sits in a chair at the end of the table and rests her face on clenched fists. Her mouth is tight and her eyes burn like his father's eyes.

"You might just as well go back to bed," his mother says. "I ain't cookin' but enough for the men. And mind you don't wake your sisters."

Lucille does not move from the chair. She grinds her teeth, distorting her face. Tom is glad she is not coming. It would make it too much like any other family outing, and it is not. It is a serious and dangerous work—a once or at most twice a year occasion of great importance. He himself was not allowed to go until two winters before, though he had begged and pleaded with his father for two years before that. Even though full-grown at fourteen, able to do a man's work on the farm, he had not been allowed along until he had turned sixteen, and even then with grave reservations on his father's part.

Phil comes down the stairs and his father returns fully dressed from the bedroom and they sit at the table and eat. His mother moves from stove to table, bringing platters of eggs and hotcakes, a plate heaped with bacon, a pot of steaming black coffee. The room is rich with food smells. At the end of the table his sister Lucille sits, her face still resting on her fists.

"How do you know when it's the right night, Pop?" Tom asks.

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"A lot of things, boy. The fog for one. It's got to be just right, thick and wet and hard to see through, but not so hard that the cars slow down. Then there's the traffic. I listen and hear how much is going by. Them people out there travel the road in bunches, I don't know just why. If there ain't many cars early in the evening, then there won't be many later on. Friday is a good night, when people from down on the coast are going over to the valley for the week-end. Sometimes Sunday nights are good too. People who've been down to the coast go back to the valley and the city on Sunday. But you can't tell for sure —you just got to feel it."

"Is tonight going to be a good night?" Tom says.

Down the table Phil guffaws.

"Don't laugh at the boy, Philip. He's got twice the brains you got in that slab-sided head of yours. He's got to ask questions to learn."

"Aw Paw, I didn't mean nothin'," Phil says.

"I don't know if this is going to be a good night or not, Tom," his father says. "There ain't really no way of knowing, beyond knowin' the right fog. But maybe tonight there'll be good pickin's, and then we're set for the year."

"We had a real good score six years ago, didn't we, Paw?" Phil says.

"Yeah, we had one then all right. Eight hundred and fifty-six dollars —that was a year to remember. Your mother got a new dress and I bought a new plow and all you kids had shoes and jeans and we shingled the house. Plenty for everyone. That was the best cash crop this little farm ever had. But that kind don't happen often."

They eat in silence, Phil slurping up egg yoke with his spoon, his father and Tom cutting everything into precise squares, sopping up the yokes with biscuits.

"All right," his father says. "Let's get going. Lucille, you go the hell to bed. Maw can wait up if she wants to, but you need your rest."

"Aw Pop," Lucille says, pouting.

"Git!" his father says.

They pull on their thick coats and hats and gloves and his father gets a flashlight from the cupboard and checks his revolver for shells. "Tom, you can carry the rope," he says. "Philip, you get the bell and the wire. I'll bring the burlap."

They file out of the house, their faces quickly beading with moisture from the fog. Behind them is a rectangle of light from the door until his mother pulls it shut—then there is nothing, the heavily curtained windows showing no sign of habitation. They walk down the path between fields and over the wooden foot bridge across the creek.

Ahead of them they can see only vague shapes, but Tom knows the valley by heart. He can feel the cliff rearing up ahead of them, rising to the hogback that the road winds

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around. The cliff rises almost 200 sheer feet from the valley, and only a few stunted trees and bushes cling to its rocky face.

On top of the cliff the edge of the road is guarded by only a few white-painted posts. Above that, another 80 or 100 feet up the ridge, another section of the road hairpins around the end of the hogback, then makes a wide turn, becoming the lower section of the road that sweeps around the tight corner at the top of the cliff and proceeds, less sharply, through the mountains toward the big inland valley.

They climb now, up the steep trail that leads from the farm to the road. Ahead of him Tom can just make out his father's sinewy back, a roll of burlap slung across his shoulder like a sack of flour. Behind him Tom can hear Phil's thick panting. Tom does not pant. Even when the air is thick and painful in his throat and his forehead is wet with sweat mixed with the fog, he holds his mouth closed, breathing rhythmically through his nose. He will not pant and let his father hear him.

At last they crest the ridge and stand on the edge of the macadam highway. His father leads up the grade to the left, around the sharp curve, and on up. Seyenty-five yards beyond the curve he stops, by the diamond-shaped warning sign, and drops the burlap.

"All right, Philip," his father says, "You climb on up with the signal wire."

"Lemme take a rest, Paw," Phil says. "I'm wore out."

"No excuse for that at your age. Go on now. And where the hell are your gloves?"

"I put 'em in my pocket, Paw. I was sweatin'."

"Okay, put them on now. From here on I don't want to take no chances of there being fingerprints on anything. From now until we're back in the house, both of you boys wear your gloves, you hear me?"

They nod assent. Phil goes across the road and fixes the bell to a tree trunk, cinching a wire around the tree so that the bell hangs free on its flexible metal support. He hooks the end of the roll of wire directly to the handle of the bell. Then he begins to climb up the ridge through the underbrush, unrolling the wire as he makes his way toward the upper stretch of the highway.

"Give me a hand with this burlap," his father says to Tom.

Together they hoist the roll of burlap to the top of the warning sign and attach it there. The sign, facing the highway, reads SLOW TO 15, and shows a diagram of the turn, a narrow hairpin-shaped black line with an arrow on one end.

His father finishes rigging the burlap while Tom watches, taking pains to see just how it is done. The burlap is fixed to the sign all along its top, with a spring mechanism and a release cord.

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When his father is finished, they carry the end of the release cord with them and retreat to the underbrush at the side of the road. They make a place to crouch under some branches and hunker down to wait.

The bell on the tree across the road rings five or six times.

"Phil's in place," Tom's father says. "Now all we can do is wait and see. And hope the cash crop will be a good one this year."

"Can I smoke?" Tom says.

"Yeah, but put it out if you hear a car coming—any car, not just a good one."

"Yes, sir," Tom says. He pulls the fixings out of his mackinaw pocket and rolls himself a cigarette. But he has only had a couple of drags when they hear a rumble above them on the upper stretch of highway. He takes two more quick puffs and then knocks the coal off the end of the cigarette.

They watch the road until a battered old pickup truck rolls by, brakes squealing as the driver slows for the turn ahead.

When the pickup is gone, Tom tries to relight the cigarette but it has become water-soaked and is falling apart. He throws it away in disgust.

"If we don't make out so good this time, couldn't we try again in a few weeks?" he asks.

"Nope. Too risky," his father says. "Once a year is about all we can chance it. Of course if we get one without our trying, we take what we can find. But we don't dare do this more than once a year. Somebody might get suspicious."

"Is that how you got the idea, Pop? Somebody going off by mistake?"

"That's right, boy. That was a long time ago. It was a hell of a hard year and a fancy car went off the cliff and I found nearly $200 on the driver. It pulled us through that year and that's how I got the idea of harvesting a cash crop from the highway regular every year."

Above them they hear the sound of another car passing on the upper stretch. Then suddenly the bell on the tree across the road clangs into life. It rings three quick times.

"This is it, boy," his father says. He yanks the release cord and the bottom of the burlap falls free, completely covering the sign. They duck down in the underbrush and wait.

"What kind of people are they mostly that go off the road?" Tom says.

"Oh, hell, I don't know. Nobody like you and me, nobody from around here. City people mostly. Be quiet, boy, and watch."

He has never before thought to wonder who the people are, and suddenly it itches at Tom. He thinks it strange that he has never thought of it. Of course, the two previous years he did not get a close look. The people were dead at the bottom of the cliff and his

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father did not want Tom to see them. And before that he had thought of them only as cars, not people—cars from which his father and his older brother got money—their cash crop, as his father called it, to tide them over and even buy seed for the crops when the year had been extra-bad.

It is not a profitable farm, their little place in the canyon. Two cows, a few pigs, some chickens, vegetables for the family, and hay and potatoes—but not much extra to sell for money. Tom has chiefly thought of each year's cash crop as an evening outing, an adventure that happened to you once a year if you were old enough.

But now, suddenly, he wonders who the people in the cars are.

Hell, he thinks, they're just city people. Nobody really.

The car comes down the road, moving faster on the downgrade. On the upper stretch of highway above, the cars move slowly, coming out of a long stretch of twisting road. But past the hogback and on the wider sweeping turn and then on the long straight stretch leading to where Tom and his father are hidden, the driver is lulled into thinking there are no more curves. Unless he is from nearby and knows the road, he usually takes his foot off the brake and the subtle downgrade of the road carries him faster than he realizes—until he sees the warning sign.

The car flashes past, the driver seeing the covered warning sign only as a blur in the fog. The tires sing on the pavement and the wind whips the underbrush. Then, beyond them down the highway, they hear the frantic squeal of the brakes as the driver suddenly comes to the turn. The squeal seems to prolong into seconds and minutes, until, halfway around the curve, the tires leave the macadam. Then the hurtling car crashes through one of the guard posts and there are a series of thumps and crunches, and the tinkling sound of breaking glass, as the car rolls and bounces down the cliff.

Above them they hear Phil breaking through the underbrush. "Hot damn," he shouts. "We got one of them. Rich one too, I bet."

"Shall we go, Pop?" Tom says.

"Wait," his father says. He stands waist-deep in the underbrush, his head cocked to one side. "Didn't hit bottom."

"You mean it hung up on the cliff?"

"Must have. Unless it turned into an airplane. We'll wait here for Philip."

They stand beside the road, listening to the sound of the older brother in the undergrowth. Finally Phil appears on the other side of the highway, the wire rolled around his arm.

"Can I leave this here?" he says.

"Bring it," his father says.

Phil detaches the bell and Tom and his father take down the bur-

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lap. Then the three of them walk quickly down the highway toward the curve.

They lean out over the edge, holding on to the guard posts, and strain their eyes down the cliff for the car. "There it is," Tom's father says. "About seventy-five feet down, hanging by a tree."

"What'll we do now?" Tom says.

"I'll have to climb down and either kick the car loose or check it over for stuff there."

"Let me go, Pop," Tom says. "I can do it easier than you."

"Why don't we all go, huh, Paw?" Phil says.

"Can't," his father says. "The one that goes will have to go down on the rope. Too steep and too dark to just climb."

"I'll go," Tom says.

"They might still be alive, boy," his father says. "It might be pretty messy, or they might put up a fight."

"I can handle it," Tom says. "If they're alive I'll give the car a couple of kicks and if that don't do it I'll knock them over the head. They won't be in any condition to do much after that roll."

"Okay," his father says. "I guess you can go. You should be old enough to face things now."

Tom unslings the rope from his shoulder and they knot it around his waist. "Here, take this," his father says just as Tom is starting down the cliff. He hands him the revolver. Tom rolls the cylinder under his thumb and puts the weapon in his mackinaw pocket. Then he starts down, his father and his brother paying the rope out slowly, Tom's feet searching for holds in the cliff.

The car is upside-down, snubbed precariously against a tree and a few rock outcroppings. Tom is beside it before he hears the man's voice.

"Helen, are you all right? Helen, speak to me! Oh, God. Helen?"

He hears a moan—probably the woman because it sounds different.

"What happened, honey?" she says.

"Oh, God, why did I take this road?"

"What happened, honey? Where are we?"

"We went off the edge of the road. We're on the side of a cliff, I think. I don't know where we are. Oh, God, why did I take this road?"

Tom stands frozen near the rear of the car, holding his breath. He takes one hand from the rope and fumbles for the gun in his mackinaw pocket.

Suddenly the man's head appears at the window of the car, swivels to look around, and stops as he sees Tom.

"Thank God, oh, thank God, you've come," the man says. "We went off the road. I guess you know that. My wife. Pregnant. We were hurrying to the city, to the hospital. She's in labor."

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Tom has raised his foot and is estimating how he should kick the car to dislodge it when the man says what he says about his wife, his voice high with panic.

"Don't worry about me," the man goes on. "Get my wife out first. Can you do it? Are we in danger of falling further?"

His eyes look at Tom like a dog's eyes begging his master. Tom inches his way down the slope and squats to peer into the car's window. On the far side of the car he sees the man's wife, her face drawn by pain, her eyes closed. She is lying partly on her side, one leg tucked underneath her swollen belly.

"Please, you've got to get her out before the baby comes," the man urges. "You can do it, can't you? I'll pay you—pay enough to make it worth your while no matter how dangerous it is. I have over $500 on me. You can have all of it. Just save my wife."

She is lying there, and for an instant Tom sees her as his own mother, fat with his littlest sister four years before. The man looks up, begging him to help, blood running down the man's face and soaking into his shirt collar.

"We'll get her out," Tom says. "Get you out too—don't you worry. You just lie still there while I go back up. Don't move or the car'll fall the rest of the way."

He scrambles up the rope, not waiting to be pulled, but climbing hand over hand. After a few moments his father and brother see what he is doing and pull up on the rope, dragging him up the cliff.

"We got to get them out," Tom pants. "There's a pregnant woman there, in labor pains. Man was taking her to the hospital."

His father and his brother stand and stare at him.

"Pop, we gotta hurry. She's having a baby. Like mom. The man'll pay. He said he'd pay. He's got over $500 on him."

"Good," his father says, his voice cold and raspy.

"We got to help him," Tom says, his voice rising.

"No, we don't," his father says. "We got to get the money, but we don't have to help him. He ain't nothing to us. We don't even know him. But if we help him maybe he'll put two and two together and turn us in. Then the police will connect us with all those other crashes here. No, son, we don't have to help him."

"Pop, his wife looks just like Mom looked when she was pregnant with Sally. We *got* to!"

"Philip," his father says, turning to Tom's brother, "you go on down and kick that car over."

Tom stands up, looking from his father to his brother. Phil starts toward him to untie the rope.

"They're human beings, Pop," Tom says.

"They ain't anybody we know," his father says. "We got to take care of our own kin first."

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Phil is almost up to him when Tom pulls the revolver out of his pocket. "I tell you we got to help them," he says. "I ain't going to let you push that car over and kill those people."

His brother jumps back and his father stares at him.

"Now Tom, what're you thinking of?" his father says. "Put down that gun, boy. You wouldn't do violence to your own kinfolk to help some strangers, would you?"

"Phil," Tom says, "you go down there and help that lady out of the car. Tie her onto the rope and Pop and me will pull her up. You can stay down there on the cliff and we'll throw the rope down to you and you can tie the man on and then come up yourself."

Phil grunts. "What makes you think I'm going to do what a pup like you tells me?" he says.

"You better do it or I'll shoot you. And listen, Phil, don't you push that car off and then try to tell me it went by itself. If that car goes, I'm going to kill you—and I mean it."

The gun is shaking in his hand and Tom feels a tightness of his face.

"Do what your brother says, Phil," his father says quietly.

Tom unties the rope from his waist with one hand and throws the end of it to Phil.

"I guess you know what you're doing?" his father says. "Selling out your kinfolk for strangers."

"We can't let them die, Pop," Tom says. "And we'll get the $500 anyway."

"We'll get the law on our necks, boy. You've sold out your kinfolks."

Phil is tying the rope around his own waist and Tom is standing near his father, pointing the gun halfway between the two. From below they suddenly hear the man's voice.

"Oh, my God, the baby's coming," the man screams.

Tom and his father and Phil lean over the edge of the cliff, peering down into the fog. Below them the car lurches heavily. The man tries to climb out of the window as the car shivers, then slides from its perch. There are the sounds of metal smashing against rock, and then a final crash from the bottom of the cliff.

"Well, I guess we get our cash crop after all," Phil says, starting to untie the rope. "Unless the car burns."

"It won't burn," his father says. "Man had the ignition off. Won't burn unless we burn it, after we've got the $500."

"They were human beings, Pop," Tom says. "Human beings just like us."

"Shut up and give me the gun," his father says. "We got work to do."

Tom stares at his father. Then he turns and throws the gun over the cliff into the fog. For a moment all

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three stand still, until they hear the gun land far below.

Tom walks past his father toward the trail down the cliff.

"They weren't anyone we knew, Tom," his father says, his voice suddenly weak, almost like that of the man in the car when he was begging Tom to help. "You got to think of your own kin first."

"No," Tom says. "Not me. I'm nobody's kin. I don't live here any more."

He walks to the trail and down it and out across the little valley, his eyes blurred by tears. Behind him he hears his father and his older brother scrambling down the trail.

"Tom, wait!" his father shouts.

He walks rapidly toward the house, wondering how the sheriff's voice will sound in the telephone and how he will tell him what he has to tell and how it will feel to turn in his own father and his brother and himself for murder. He wonders who will take care of his mother and his sisters. He walks faster, hurrying to do what he has to do before his strength of purpose and his anger fail him.

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Anthology roundup: ELLERY QUEEN'S 16TH MYSTERY ANNUAL (Random, $3.95) is possibly the best-balanced and most stimulating volume in this fine long series—a 5-star collection. Don Congdon's TALES OF LOVE AND TERROR (Ballantine 522K, 35¢) is admirable in quality, design and originality; Alfred Hitchock's STORIES FOR LATE AT NIGHT (Random, $5.95) leans toward the familiar, but quality is high and generosity (including an entire novel by Margaret Millar) phenomenal.

★★★★ **WAIT FOR THE WEDDING, *by Celia Fremlin*** (Lippincott, $3.95)

Yet another distinguished novel of menace domestic by this Edgar-winning sorceress, this time about ancient hatreds and modern terrors in the lives of the very old. (English title: SEVEN LEAN YEARS.)

★★★★ **THE WRONG SIDE OF THE SKY, *by Gavin Lyall*** (Scribner's, $3.95)

Athens and Tripoli are the foci of peril in this thriller by a new author who knows plotting and storytelling as well as he knows his exotic locales.

★★★ **THE HOUSE OF SOLDIERS, *by Andrew Garve*** (Harper, $3.50)

Freshly devised and unpredictable dangers spring from an Irish archeologist's efforts to bring Tara back to life.

★★★ **COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENSE, *by Jeffrey Ashford*** (Harper, $3.50)

Deft legal invention in emotionally powerful suspense story—like an improbable collaboration of Henry Cecil and Cornell Woolrich.

★★★ **THE PAPERS OF ANDREW MELMOTH, *by Hugh Sykes Davies*** (Morrow, $3.50)

Mystery? Science fiction? Psychological novel? Satiric essay? A little of each, and as welcome as it is unclassifiable.

For a new experience in crime, see the SELECTED TALES of Nikolai Leskov (1831-1895), freshly translated by David Magarshack (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, $5). Among other marvels, this includes *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1865)—a Russian classic which deserves to be recognized in English as one of the great fictional murder studies of the nineteenth century.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HUGH PENTECOST**

TITLE: ***Murder by a Southpaw***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Uncle George Crowder

LOCALE: Lakeview, United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *It looked as if the greatest left-handed pitcher in the world was guilty of murder. But 12-year-old Joey Trimble had complete faith in his baseball hero . . .*

JOEY TRIMBLE WAS THE ONLY PERson in Lakeview who knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Lefty Davis was not guilty of murder.

Everybody did know that Lefty Davis was a great southpaw pitcher. According to Joey he was the greatest who'd ever played the game. If he hadn't chosen, inexplicably, to make a career out of running Sportsman's Lodge on the outskirts of town he would certainly have been in the big leagues, and his name would have been remembered along with such great lefthanders as Rube Waddell, Lefty Grove, Carl Hubbell, Herb Pennock and Warren Spahn.

Lefty Davis was past his prime now, but he'd still pitched Lakeview to the Inter-State League championship year after year. To accuse such a man of murder was, Joey Trimble knew, an absurdity. He tried to convince his father of this at the supper table, but it wasn't working.

Hector Trimble, the local druggist, was a man of strong opinions, and Joey was only twelve years old. This combination of circumstances stacked the cards against Joey.

Hector Trimble ran a good, modern drug store in Lakeview, and he was a first-class pharmacist. To some people he may have seemed a man of foibles. He

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washed his hands twenty-five times a day, but that seemed quite proper in his business. He had a phobia about dirt, also quite proper.

He would not allow Joey to have any pets. Dog or cat hairs were an anathema to him. They might wind up in somebody's prescription. He was, also, a man whose opinions on any subject in the world—and he had them on any subject in the world—could not be shaken.

Joey was a problem to Hector. Joey did not have the scientific bent of mind Hector had hoped for. He seemed to revel in dirt. The only things Joey liked were animals, the woods, guns and hunting dogs, and every kind of sport yet devised by man.

Finally, one of Joey's many heroes was his Uncle George Crowder. Hector had to admit that once upon a time George Crowder had been an important man. He had been a successful lawyer and State's Attorney; and he was headed for the Governor's mansion, many people said. But in his capacity as public prosecutor, George Crowder had, inadvertently, sent an innocent man to the electric chair.

After that he had closed his office and disappeared from Lakeview. Drinking himself to death, people said. Eventually he returned to Lakeview and built himself a little cabin in the woods. He lived there with his setter dog, Timmy. Some people said that he came home because he ran out of money. They said he was being supported by his sister, Hector Trimble's wife.

But most people liked Uncle George, knew he was a wise man, a gentle man, a sad but understanding man. To Hector he was a lazy man, a do-nothing, a disgrace—and his wife's brother and his son's hero. It was a little hard to take.

"This murder is an unpleasant subject," Hector Trimble said at the supper table to his mild-mannered wife and his small, stubborn son. "We cannot, however, view these things on a fairy-tale basis. Lefty Davis may be the greatest baseball player that ever lived. I will concede it, so that we may go on to more consequential areas of discussion. He is, I think even you will admit, Joseph, left-handed."

"I'll say," Joey said.

"Precisely. Notoriously left-handed," Hector said. "He is also a human being, subject to the weaknesses and passions of a human being."

"He wouldn't kill anybody," Joey said.

Hector's eyelids lowered as if in a moment of silent prayer. "Because, I suppose, he can throw the best—the best spitball of all time?"

"The spitball has been outlawed for years and years," Joey said, shocked and embarrassed by Hector's ignorance, especially in front of Mother.

"Be that as it may," Hector said. "He is, you will concede, notoriously left-handed. It is equally well-

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known that he has been in love with Fay Caldwell since they were kids together. It is further fact that he was pretty badly broken up when she married this man Laverick—a stranger here. And when it got out that Laverick was mistreating Fay, your left-handed hero, Joseph, got what is inelegantly known as 'plastered' and made some dire threats against Laverick."

"He was just talking!" Joey said, with fierce loyalty.

"Perhaps he was, at the time, just talking," Hector said. "Now we come to the present situation. Mr. Donald Laverick and wife—she the said Fay Caldwell—come to Lakeview to enjoy the hunting and fishing. They stay—why I cannot imagine—at Sportsman's Lodge, owned and operated by your left-handed hero. There are only two other guests at the Lodge—a man named Emerson and a man named Blakely, neither of whom has ever seen the Lavericks before this week end. Now, at the Lodge there are—"

"Will you have some more tea, Father?" Esther Trimble asked mildly.

"Be good enough to let me finish, Mother. At the Lodge the bedrooms are on the second floor. Three of them, overlooking the trout stream, open onto a balcony. There is no balcony outside any other rooms on the second floor—only a narrow ledge.

"Now, the three rooms opening onto the balcony were occupied by the Lavericks, Mr. Emerson, and Mr. Blakely. According to his wife, Laverick couldn't sleep, so about midnight he got up, put on his overcoat, and went out on to the balcony. He sat down in a chair out there and lit a cigar. About ten minutes later he was shot, squarely between the eyes, with a .38 caliber revolver! Emerson, Blakely, and Mrs. Laverick were all asleep."

"*They* say!" Joey muttered.

"Please, Joseph. Let me finish. They were asleep. They were wakened by the shot. They all appeared on the balcony at the same time in various degrees of disattire. None of them owns a gun."

"They threw it in the river," Joey said.

"Please, Joey. Your left-handed hero *does* own a .38 caliber police special, and it was found on the terrace under the balcony, recently fired."

"He kept it in the office downstairs." Joey said. "Somebody took it."

"I concede, without the other facts involved, Joseph, that might be a possibility. But daylight revealed other facts obvious to the trained eye. The shot was not fired from the balcony. The murderer stood on the ledge at the corner of the building. There are marks there to prove it.

"Now, listen attentively, Joseph. You can't stand on that ledge. It's only an inch or so wide. The murderer had to hang onto the win-

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dow casing of the empty room around the corner. And he did. There are blurred fingerprints to prove it. He had to hang on with his right hand, reach around with his left—with his *left* hand, you notice, Joseph—and fire the gun with his left hand. He had to face in.

"No one could stand with his back to the building and bend his right arm around the corner. The gun had to be fired left-handed. There isn't a shadow of doubt on this score."

Joey was silent. This he knew was not susceptible to argument. He had tried it himself. He had tried standing with his back to the corner of the woodshed and shooting an imaginary gun around the corner to his right with his right hand. It couldn't be done.

Hector sensed triumph. "Add to that the incontrovertible fact that neither Mrs. Laverick, nor Emerson, nor Blakely is left-handed. Certainly Emerson and Blakely had no motive since they didn't know Laverick. But who did hate Laverick? Your friend Lefty Davis.

"And who, in addition to being the greatest left-handed pitcher of all time, is the state pistol shooting champion? Your friend Lefty Davis. He shoots with his left hand, and he shoots extremely well. Laverick was shot squarely between the eyes by a left-handed man. Q.E.D."

Joey was silent. It was hard to argue. There had to be a way to prove the evidence was lying, though, because anybody sensible knew that the greatet left-handed pitcher in the world would not kill anybody.

"If you still have doubts, Joey," Mrs. Trimble said, "why don't you talk to your Uncle George about it?"

Hector Trimble stared at his wife like a man who has just been slapped. Then he rose, with great dignity. "I think I will go down to the store and work on the accounts for a while," he said. Just before he reached the front door they heard him snort. "Uncle George! Heaven help us!" And the front door slammed behind him.

Red Egan, the Lakeview sheriff, felt pretty bad about having to arrest Lefty Davis for murder. The truth was, Lefty had been a hero of his, too. And Lefty was a swell guy. But, Red told himself, women can drive swell guys crazy. Laverick had been pretty much of a sadist, from all accounts. Lefty still loved Fay Laverick. And you couldn't get around the left-handed facts and the ownership of the gun.

Red Egan was eating lunch at the Lodge with Mr. Emerson and Mr. Blakely, the two sportsmen whose vacation had been marred by tragedy, when Joey Trimble and Old George Crowder wandered in. Uncle George, despite his woodsman's clothes, was still a man who walked and spoke with a quiet dignity, even elegance. His face was

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weather-beaten and deeply lined, but they were lines of tolerance and humor. He was introduced to the two sportsmen who were taking the afternoon train back to New York. That's why Red Egan was there. He also ran the local taxi.

Uncle George spoke gravely to Red. "I have been engaged by Mr. Joseph Trimble here, Red, to act for the defense."

"Oh," Red said.

Mr. Emerson, a dark, thin man with bushy eyebrows, looked up from his plate of ham and eggs, scowling. Mr. Blakely, a large fat man with a round, laughing face, winked at Uncle George and chuckled.

"Mrs. Laverick not here?" Uncle George asked.

"At the hospital, suffering from shock," Red said.

"And Lefty?"

"In the hoosegow. Where else?"

"Evidence seems pretty complete," Uncle George said.

"Open and shut," Red said.

Uncle George was watching Mr. Emerson and Mr. Blakely attack their ham and eggs. "Both of you gentlemen are right-handed. I see," he said.

Mr. Blakely's stomach jiggled as he said, "Unfortunately for the defense, I gather our murderer is something of a local hero."

"He's just the greatest left-handed pitcher that ever lived—that's all he is!" Joey said.

"A great loss to the National Pastime," Mr. Blakely said, gravely, to Joey.

"Never ran across a case before where the question of a crime being committed with a left hand was so firmly established," Uncle George said.

"No way around it," Red said. "And Lefty is the only lefty in the joint. *With* a motive—*and* a crack shot with his left hand."

Joey looked hopefully at Uncle George, waiting for him to destroy the evidence. Uncle George seemed dreamy, resigned to defeat.

"Funny thing about being left-handed," Uncle George said. "Some people look on it as a kind of deformity. I know mothers who spend years teaching naturally left-handed kids to do everything with their right hands—eat, write, things like that. But they still use the left hand for other things."

Uncle George shook his head. "Funny thing, though. You can always tell if you look close. A fellow will always collect more dirt under the fingernails of the hand he uses the most." Uncle George drew a deep breath and reached out a hand to Joey's shoulder.

Then suddenly the fingers of Uncle George's hand bit into Joey's shoulder. Uncle George was staring at Mr. Blakely, his eyes as bright as two new dimes.

And Mr. Blakely, unaware of Uncle George's scrutiny, was carefully studying the fingernails of his left hand. Suddenly Mr. Blakely

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looked up and the color drained from his fat face. "Now wait a minute—look here!" he said.

Joey saw the sweat break out on Mr. Blakely's forehead.

It was several hours later. Joey sat on the front steps of Uncle George's cabin, hugging himself and rocking back and forth. Uncle George was drowsing in the hammock, and Timmy, the setter dog, was lying stretched out in the afternoon sun. Then Timmy pricked up his ear, and a moment later Joey heard Red Egan's jeep coming up the trail.

Red had a passenger, a tall, lanky man in blue jeans and a leather jacket. This man got out of the jeep and walked straight up to Joey.

"I guess I owe you an awful lot, young feller," Lefty Davis said.

Joey blushed with embarrassment and pleasure. "It wasn't me, Lefty. It was Uncle George."

Uncle George came to the top of the steps, filling his pipe. "I see it all worked out," he said.

"Slick as a whistle," Red Egan said. "As soon as we knew he was left-handed, we started to check, and he cracked wide open. He and Laverick were business associates. Laverick pulled some kind of a fast one that had Blakely behind the eight ball.

"When they met here, they kept the fact they'd known each other a secret. But Blakely persuaded Laverick to meet him on the balcony for a talk when everyone else was asleep. Then he stole Lefty's gun out of the office and went into the empty room around the corner from him. When Laverick came out on the balcony, Blakely hung onto the window casing and shot him with Lefty's gun.

"Then he dropped the gun, went back into his own room, and appeared on the balcony, as though he'd just waked up. The D.A. is still getting the details from him—the stuff about the business deal and all. But you turned the trick, George. If you hadn't known that fact about collecting more dirt under the fingernails of the hand you use the most, we'd never have tripped him."

Uncle George held a match to his pipe, then he began to laugh, softly. "So far as I know, Red, that 'fact' about fingernails is sheer nonsense. I just made it up.

"When I was a-kid," Uncle George said, "we had a trick we used to pull. Say one of the fellows was sweet on a girl who had freckles. We'd say, quite casually, in a group, of course. 'Did you know that if you kiss a girl with freckles you'll grow warts in the palm of your hand?'

"And sure enough, a minute or so later you'd see the kid sneak a look at his hand. Sometimes more than one kid! It always worked." Uncle George puffed at his pipe. "I couldn't think of anything else to try. So, we got lucky!"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 224th "first story" published by EQMM . . . A wry and ironic tale which can be described as a peephole view of a Hollywood success story.

The author was born in 1937 and wrote his first short story at the age of 6. It was truly a short story since it was exactly 31 words long. The theme? An "incisive satire," according to Mr. Curtis, "on knickers."

Mr. Curtis attended Syracuse University where, "among other colossally important events," he met and fell in love with the girl who was to become his wife, and "with the author who was to be a continuing inspiration—Henry James." Mr. Curtis went on to get his master's degree at the University of Wyoming, where he did his thesis on—of course, Henry James. "It was a good thesis," Mr. Curtis tells us, "and will be published when I am famous."

His "first story"—the one you are about to read—is, in Mr. Curtis' own words, "the product of a unique combination of writer, literary agent, husband, and madman."

ONE WAY TO WRITE BEST SELLERS

by RICHARD CURTIS

PETER SUTTON WAS A BAD WRITER, but his articles were enormously popular. What he lacked in grace he made up in an uncanny sense of what was newsworthy and of human interest. Although he was born poor, he had cultivated an air of breeding and charm which enabled him to move with ease among celebrities, to disarm them and make them confide in him. Thus he was often privy to information long in advance of reporters, and for this reason he was given important assignments by editors of national magazines.

Peter's wife Adelaide was a bad writer, too, but she had none of her husband's plus values. She wrote drab love stories, and sold occasional articles to family magazines, and her work wasn't in great demand. Although people spoke of the Suttons as "a writing team," it was no secret that they were giving the benefit of the doubt to Adelaide. It was obvious that Peter had the talent.

They had married for love. That

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was before Peter began to hit the bigtime with his articles. They had once had a romantic notion that their names would be eternally linked as a literary twosome. But Peter's fame soon raised him high above her, and it was almost inevitable that he should fall out of love with her. Before long, few people acknowledged her either as a writer or as Peter's mate—including Peter himself.

One Saturday afternoon at a cocktail party Peter had a conversation with Holbrook Stanton, one of Hollywood's most glamorous movie stars. Stanton was fifty-five years old, and his age was more apparent in person than on the screen. In a movie he could pass for a man in his thirties, and he gave the impression of an eternally youthful lover. He was now at the height of his career.

"But I'll confide in you," he said after Peter had flattered him. "I've had a long talk with my doctor, and it doesn't look good." He patted his chest.

Peter frowned. "You surely don't mean . . . ?"

"It's the ticker, I'm afraid."

Peter set his drink down and tried to look grimly at Stanton. Peter was a hypocrite. But then, so many people in Hollywood were, and hypocrisy seemed the easiest way to survive there. Peter chose to say, "But that's incredible. You're so young."

"I'm older than I'd like my public to believe. The doctor confirmed that. He told me if I exerted myself too much—well, I could go any moment."

"And you begin shooting *Anguish in My Heart* the day after tomorrow, don't you?"

Stanton laughed. "Apt title. Wouldn't it be ironic if I dropped dead of a heart attack while filming it?"

"That's something you don't joke about," Peter said solemnly. "Can't you get out of it somehow?"

"I don't want to—there's nothing as useless as a retired actor in Hollywood. If I'm going to go, I want to go in the thick of things. It's in keeping with the glamorous way of life." Then, taking a long gulp of his drink, he said, "That's what I wanted to speak to you about."

"Oh?"

"I don't want to die any more than the next man, but you have to look at it realistically. No man likes to think that when he dies he—well, just stops. Especially someone who's made a great success of his life. I want to be remembered."

"Certainly. But where do I fit in?"

"I thought you might help prolong my memory."

"No one deserves it more than you. How can I help?"

Stanton put his hand on Peter's shoulder. "Peter, I want you to write my biography."

Peter nodded. "That's very shrewd of you."

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"I thought you'd appreciate the idea. You see, if you gave me the full treatment—you know, beloved by millions, uncorrupted by Hollywood, legendary figure, and so forth—and then rushed the book to press right after my death, it would sort of immortalize me. Which, by the public's standards, means I'd be remembered for at least as long as the book was in print. But it's something, anyway."

Peter looked thoughtful, but he said nothing.

"The association of your name with mine," Stanton went on, "would make you rich and famous. Think it over, Peter. People like to read your stuff. They expect you to have the inside story for them. It would be the perfect book. What do you say?"

"It sounds macabre, Holbrook. It's like speaking of you as if you were already dead."

"That's nonsense, and you know it. Drop by my apartment tomorrow afternoon and I'll give you my files, scrapbooks—all the pertinent lurid details."

"Well . . ."

Stanton shrugged. "If you don't have the stomach for it, I'll simply have to try and find someone who has."

Peter looked up. "It's gruesome, Holbrook, but, as you say, we have to be realistic about these things."

"I'll see you tomorrow, then," said Stanton, moving off into the crowd to join one of his ex-wives.

All his protests to Holbrook Stanton notwithstanding, Peter managed to call H. A. Cosgrove & Sons, a major New York publisher, first thing Monday morning, and three days later he signed a contract for an unprecedented sum on *Anguish in My Heart: The Tragic Story of Holbrook Stanton.*

Peter couldn't promise Cosgrove that Stanton would die while shooting the film, of course, but to be on the safe side they set up type on the book as fast as Peter could turn the copy in. All that remained to be done was a last chapter—to be added when Stanton died.

Holbrook Stanton, beloved by millions, uncorrupted by Hollywood, legendary figure, and so forth, dropped dead of a heart attack during the fifth week of filming *Anguish in My Heart.* Hollywood and the American public were stunned by the news.

As Stanton had predicted, the book had an immediate and fabulous success. Life for Peter became a hurricane of cocktail and dinner parties, luncheons, lectures, television appearances, conferences with his publisher—and, naturally, one or two condolence calls. If Peter was well-known before, he had now become an enormous celebrity.

A few months after publication, Peter was sitting in his study, meditating on success and wondering about the future. There was a knock at the door, and Adelaide came in.

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"I don't seem to see very much of you lately," she said coolly, yet beseechingly.

"I've been pretty busy."

"I know. I've missed you."

"Thank you, darling," Peter said politely.

She stood inside the doorway, hesitating to come farther into the room. "Why don't you take me with you to cocktail parties and things like that? You used to."

"Yes," he said, shifting uncomfortably in his leather chair. "But they're really very boring affairs. I know you never liked to go to them. I just don't feel like burdening you with them."

"That's kind of you, Peter. And all this time I've been under the delusion that you were bored with me."

He forced a laugh. "Don't be foolish. It's nothing like that," he said. There was a long pause. Peter groped for something to say. "What have you been doing lately?"

"Oh, writing, mostly," she said spiritlessly.

"What have you been writing?"

"A few romances. I just sold one to *Home Fires*."

"Ah, good for you."

"You sound overjoyed."

"I'm very pleased. Immensely. Now will you excuse me? I have some work to clean up."

She looked longingly at him, but he only averted his eyes. "I understand," she said, and walked out.

"Oh, darling—"

She whirled around. "Yes?"

"Close the door behind you, will you, please?"

"Certainly," she said dully.

Peter felt a pang of regret for her. She used to have such spirit. Her ambitions for them as a couple had given her great confidence, and her faith in their eventual, mutual success had endowed her with the beauty of a woman secure in the fulfillment of love.

But what could Peter do? He had all the talent, so he deserved all the success. There was no sense keeping up the pretense that Adelaide was accomplished. He had tried to at first, and she had reveled in his flattery. But you just can't lie like that forever, can you?

So now it was only pity he felt for her, and perhaps a touch of remorse when he thought about the happy days they had had together, the days that Adelaide continually tried to recapture—and never could.

But that was the past; the future was bidding for his attention. There were projects to do, big projects that would secure his position as a popular biographer. He had two in mind, and he'd already begun to compile his notes for them.

One book was to be about Stella Carson, the 1920s movie queen. He'd met her recently at a party, and although nobody paid much attention to her because she was a has-been, Peter sensed a story in her, maybe a best-selling story. Pro-

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ducers were beginning to revive films made in the flapper era and Stella Carson had been one of the darlings of that period. Peter had learned that a big promotion was planned on her old films.

After further investigation, he found that the actress had suffered a severe stroke a year before. She was now sixty, and when he saw her at the party he carefully noted the sunken eyes, yellow complexion, and shriveled features under the mask of make-up she wore. Peter sensed that she hadn't long to live, and on that speculation he set out to write her biography. It would be a sensational book and a sentimental one—two qualities that never failed in public interest.

He had a difficult time persuading his publisher to take the book on. Cosgrove felt that there had been too many books recently about old-time movie stars. The market, which consisted largely of the teen-age, young married, and middle-aged audience, didn't really remember Stella Carson. But on the basis of Peter's assurance, his nose for a scoop, and the success of his last book, Cosgrove gave him a contract, and the same procedure was followed as on the Stanton book.

His other project was Shirley Sheridan, a stunning and talented actress of twenty-eight who was jamming theaters with every film. Peter had captured her confidence—and her heart as well, it was not unjustifiably rumored.

One day she had told him she'd been suffering from severe headaches. A confidential talk with her doctor—a man whose confidence Peter had worked very hard to cultivate—revealed that meningitis was suspected. However, a complete diagnosis had not yet been made, and Doctor Rayford admitted it might be nothing more than migraine.

Hoping for the best, Peter had a contract drawn up on a biography of Shirley Sheridan.

Both books were completed, except for the closing chapters, in three months.

Stella Carson was the first to go. The excitement of her revival was just too much for her, and in the midst of a television tribute to her she keeled over and died, an angelic smile on her face. It was great theater. Cosgrove's fears were squashed. The book made a fortune.

It wasn't quite so easy to get Shirley Sheridan to die.

A few weeks after Stella Carson's death, Peter dropped into Doctor Rayford's office. To his inquiry about her condition, the doctor said, "She hasn't told you, then?" Peter shrugged. "Well, Peter, I'm afraid it looks pretty bad."

Peter winced. "You mean . . . fatal?"

"I'm afraid so. The laboratory confirmed it yesterday."

"How awful," Peter said. "How is she taking it?"

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"How does anyone take news like that?"

"Of course," Peter said. "How long does she have?"

"Maybe six months, but these things have been known to linger for two years."

"What does it depend on?"

"It's impossible to say. Her resistance, our medicine. It also depends on her will to live."

Rayford gestured with his glasses. "Please understand that this news is to be kept under your hat. Only you, she, and her press agent know. And I'm only telling you because—well, I understand that you and she are rather close."

"I appreciate it," Peter said, getting up to leave. "She's a fine person. I don't think she would have told me herself. Spare my feelings, you know."

"Yes, that's Shirley. Terrible thing."

Peter left the office quite upset. Two years! By then all the glory he had achieved would be faded. And since she would now be forced to retire from films, her biography would be of no consequence if she died in two years. She was news *today*.

That evening Peter drove over to Shirley's apartment hotel and went up to her penthouse, on the fifteenth floor. He made sure no one saw him take the self-service elevator.

He found her alone. She had a nightgown on.

"I'm sorry. Were you asleep?"

She yawned. "Falling asleep. I took a sleeping pill a few minutes ago. But come in. I'll try to stay awake."

Peter stepped inside, gazing at her. The marks of suffering were already evident on her face. Her eyes were swollen and her nose red, and her usually impeccable coiffure was disarranged. Although she had always been fastidious about her appearance, she now had the look of someone who recognized the futility of appearances in the presence of death.

She led him into the bedroom and got into bed. Peter sat down on the edge. "Rayford told me," he said immediately.

"I was hoping he wouldn't," Shirley said drowsily.

"I know. You're a good girl."

She smiled.

"How . . . how do you feel about it?" Peter asked.

"I've thought a lot about it," she mumbled, "and I've decided I'm going to fight for my life right up to the very last moment." Peter pursed his lips, remembering Doctor Rayford's remarks about the will to live. "First of all, look at it this way. Suppose they found a cure for the thing the day before I die?"

"That's always possible," Peter said.

"And another thing—maybe their diagnosis is all wet. It's happened, you know. Rayford said so. And even if it is correct and I am

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going to die, why, I want to have as much fun until that moment as I've had up to now."

"Good for you," Peter said. "That's the only attitude to assume in the face of death—a sort of passionate defiance."

"But do you know," she went on, "my first thought was suicide." Peter looked up suddenly. I wanted to kill myself."

"You did? Did you tell him so?"

"I did. But he was such a comfort. He took me to lunch and we had a long talk. He's a very wise man, and such a dear." She yawned and slid lower on the pillow. "He made me realize how valuable life is. He said it's most precious when we realize we're near death."

"And what did you say to that?"

"I told him I'd try to understand. And I'm not afraid of death now."

Peter shook his head. "That's wonderful, darling. Now suppose you try to get some sleep."

"Yes," she said, shutting her eyes, "I must. I'm sorry I'm such a poop."

"That's all right. I understand."

He kissed her tenderly. Then he waited. He waited a long time until she was sleeping soundly. The drug would keep her from waking up. Then he carried her into the kitchen and turned on the gas. He shut the door behind him and tiptoed out.

Peter's biography of the late Shirley Sheridan was on the best-seller list for three months.

The first murder is always the hardest. But with that obstacle out of the way the prospects for Peter became infinite. All the speculation was taken out of his books now. He could time a death to fit the best moment for publication—as long, of course, as the death seemed natural.

The next and likeliest subject of a biography was Dirk Derry, the teenage singer and actor who was just about the highest paid property in Hollywood. His films, records, personal appearances had captured the immense teenage audience, which everyone knows is a gold mine.

A major reason for Dirk's success among the teenagers was the fact that he was a rebel, and that image of him was played up in the promotions. He was independent, continually disregarding his contracts, coming and going as he wished, and leading everyone a merry chase. But he had his agents and producers hogtied because they knew his value. They had to humor him.

What they most feared was his recklessness. To let off steam he'd hop into his foreign sports car and speed off along the dangerous roads surrounding Los Angeles. If he should ever fail to negotiate a curve . . .

Peter finished his book in five weeks. It was the best thing he'd done to date. He'd learned precisely what the public wanted, and his

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book had all the gimmicks—plus something else. Peter created an air of mysticism around Dirk's death. Dirk was not really dead. His body was destroyed, but not his spirit. If you concentrated you could reach him on that big drag strip in the sky. The spiritual tone of the book would have great appeal to the generation of teenagers who had somehow lost touch with religion.

It came as a surprise to no one—and especially not to Peter—when Dirk Derry failed one day to negotiate a curve.

The first edition sold out in a week, and the second large printing went almost as fast.

Dorothy Wilshire, the Hollywood commentator, threw a huge cocktail party in Peter's honor at her magnificent home overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Nearly every celebrity in Hollywood was there.

Peter was refilling his glass at the bar when a familiar voice said, "Hello, Peter." It was his wife.

"Why, Adelaide, what are you doing here?"

There was something beautiful about her—almost the same freshness she had had when they married. She was dressed in canary-yellow chiffon, and her hair was piled in a graceful coiffure, topped with a topaz-studded comb. Although he could still see the tiredness of her features beneath her make-up, there was a magnificent glow in her eyes.

"What am I doing here?" she said. "I think I'm entitled. I'm still your wife, you know."

"Of course. And I'm very glad you're here—to share the glory of this hour with me."

"Don't be ridiculous, darling. You've never shared glory with anyone."

Peter took a long sip of his drink and laughed. "I suppose that's true. I'm really very selfish."

"That's all right," Adelaide said. "But I'm still hoping . . ."

"Yes, darling," Peter said, looking about for his hostess.

"Ever since I met you, my one dream has been that our names would be linked together in glory—glory such as you're enjoying alone tonight. Remember those first articles?—'By Peter *and* Adelaide Sutton.'"

"Yes, they were . . ."

"They were almost entirely written by you. But you gave me half the credit. You loved me then."

"Adelaide, I think you'd better stop drinking."

"Perhaps you're right. Will you take me out on the patio for a breath of fresh air?"

"Certainly." He led her through the crowd and out to the patio. It was a quiet night, with only the splash of a few breakers below to mar the silence.

"But what happened?" Adelaide continued. "You couldn't stand to part with even a little bit of the credit—not even *that* much. So you

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left me to flounder by myself. Soon people referred to me as Peter Sutton's wife. Then they didn't even bother to refer to me at all."

"Adelaide, I think I'd better take you home."

"There'll be no need, thank you," she said, suddenly putting her hands on his face and neck and shoving him with all her might. "No need at all."

Peter tumbled back over the low parapet, his hands clutching wildly at hers. She squirmed away.

He fell headfirst onto the treacherous rocks below.

Adelaide began to shriek hysterically. The crowd rushed onto the patio. Adelaide passed out.

As she explained when she had regained her senses, Peter must have drunk too much. He had asked her to go out on the patio with him to get some air. Feeling sick, he had leaned over the parapet, but before she could prevent it leaned over too far.

Someone in the crowd drove her home and stayed with her until she fell asleep, still sobbing.

The next morning Adelaide Sutton called her publisher and told him to go ahead with her biography of her famous husband, and she mailed off the last chapter late that afternoon.

A Reader-Service Directory—

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AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	ON SALE DATE
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Allingham, Margery	THREE CASES FOR MR. CAMPION	Doubleday	4.50	Oct. 6
Bell, Josephine	NEW PEOPLE AT THE HOLLIES	Macmillan	2.95	Oct. 16
Daniel, Robin	DEATH BY DROWNING	Walker & Company	3.50	Oct. 11
Erskine, Margaret	THE WOMAN AT BELGUARDO	Doubleday	2.95	Oct. 20
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Sept.-Oct. 1961 Releases

DIRECTORY OF MYSTERY & SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	ON SALE DATE	ORIGINAL or REPRINT
Aarons, Edward S.	ASSIGNMENT—ANKARA	Gold Medal	35¢	September 28	O
Allingham, Margery	TEN WERE MISSING	Dell	40¢	October 26	R
Ard, William	MAKE MINE MAVIS	Monarch Books	35¢	October 6	O
Brackett, Leigh	AN EYE FOR AN EYE	Bantam Books	35¢	October 2	R
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Eberhart, Mignon G.	JURY OF ONE	Popular Library	35¢	October 19	R
Ellison, Harlan	MEMOS FROM PURGATORY	Regency Books	50¢	October 20	O
Fair, A. A.	SOME SLIPS DON'T SHOW	Pocket Books	35¢	October 15	R
Fair, A. A.	OWLS DON'T BLINK	Dell	40¢	October 5	R
Heyman, Evan Lee	MIAMI UNDERCOVER	Popular Library	35¢	October 19	O
Honig, Donald	DIVIDE THE NIGHT	Regency Books	50¢	October 20	O
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McBain, Ed	SEE THEM DIE	Pocket Books	35¢	October 15	R
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Noel, Sterling	EMPIRE OF EVIL	Avon	40¢	October 17	O
Prather, Richard S.	DAGGER OF FLESH	Gold Medal	35¢	September 28	Reissue
Quarry, Nick	SOME DIE HARD	Gold Medal	35¢	September 28	O
Tey, Josephine	A SHILLING FOR CANDLES	Berkley	50¢	October 24	Reissue
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Woolrich, Cornell	SAVAGE BRIDE	Gold Medal	35¢	September 28	Reissue

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Further comment by Anthony Boucher, mystery critic of "The New York Times" and EQMM, on the Schlock Homes stories: "Are you really sure that anything in MISADVENTURES *is better? It's not only the brilliant incidental humor but the beautifully solid double-plotting, which I don't think has ever been equaled" in Sherlockian parody-pastiches.*

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ARTIST'S MOTTLE

by ROBERT L. FISH

"CRIME, WATNEY," REMARKED MY friend, Mr. Schlock Homes, laying aside the financial section of the journal and reaching for his Yellowbole and shag, "is the contrived and exhibited manifestation of the subconscious negation of theosophistic impregnation and authoritative influence. It has the added disadvantage, of course, of being illegal, which so often forces its perpetrators into opposition to the law."

We were seated comfortably before a roaring fire in our quarters at 221B Bagel Street on a blustery afternoon in late March of '60. The whipping wind blasted our windows with that late, cold rain of a dying winter, and the calm peace of our living-room, in such sharp contrast to the bitter weather without, may have been responsible for the sudden philosophical attitude of the great detective.

"True," I replied, marvelling as always at the concise manner in which Homes could bring his intellect to bear on a point of view. "A further disadvantage, of course, is that crime does not pay."

Homes puffed strongly, sending clouds of smoke about the room. "I have heard that statement many times," he observed, frowning fiercely at the leaping flames, "but never from criminals, although one might reasonably assume they would be in the best position to comment. It may be true that crime does not pay; but then, what does these days?"

There was a note of bitterness in his voice that I had never heard before, and I sat up in alarm. Homes and I never discussed his financial position, and I had always assumed he had sufficient income to indulge his passion for deduction.

"If you are short, Homes . . ." I began, reaching for my wallet.

He shook his head. "A temporary thing, Watney, but I appreciate your offer. No; I took a flyer in De

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Diamonds Consolidated Beer, but it seems that recently some villain slipped into their headquarters and watered the stock. It was, of course, quite undrinkable after that, and it appears my losses may be substantial." He shrugged ruefully. "Coming at a time when lucrative cases are few, I fear I shall be reduced to accepting even minor commissions such as this."

He handed me a telegraph form which he took from his dressing-gown pocket.

"Homes old bean old sock," it read; "hate to bother you and all that but I am off on another of these blasted safaris and I hate to leave the old manor without having someone keep an eye on the old belongings you know stop so I would appreciate it a basinful if you could manage to drop in and see that the port is still in the cellar and that nobody steals the family silver and all that because of course the estate is entailed and I hate arguments with trustees which you can understand of course since they always get so fussy but it seems the pater loaded the old manse with valuables and objects dart and to tell you the truth I dont even know if the punk is insured stop so your beagle eye would be greatly appreciated and paid for of course at your usual rates whatever they are stop the key stop now just where the devil is it stop oh yes it is with the lawyer chappies of course stop just tell them I said you could have it stop so pip pip and wipe your feet before you go in and best of everything."

"But, Homes," I cried, turning the message over and searching the back. "This carries no name! How are you able to even determine who your client is?"

Homes smiled at my puzzlement. "The lack of a signature is in itself a signature," he replied cryptically. "You have obviously failed to note, Watney, that the message is exactly two hundred words in length, and therefore carries the standard two-hundred-word rate. To have signed the message would have taken it out of this special-rate category and made it subject to a thrupenny-ha'penny surcharge. Only a person with arithmetical training raised by Scottish standards could have been so precise—so it is easy to deduce that Sir Angus McGrogger is the author. I have been through to his advocates and am already in possession of the key which you may note he mentions in passing.

"If you are free in the morning, Watney, I should like the pleasure of your company, since the entire business is bound to be boring. The manor is located at Yulebe, Surrey, so if you would be kind enough to consult your ABC time-table, we can schedule an early start, and return before dark. I am quite anxious to be here to-morrow, for they are hanging those four felons at Pentonville, and you know my passion for strung quartettes!"

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And so, in this innocent fashion, began the case which I find filed in my notes as The Adventure of the Artist's Mottle.

Little did we know that gloomy afternoon as we riffled through the time-table, that because of this simple house inspection, Homes's abilities for deduction would be challenged to their utmost, or that because of his decision to accept this commission, his financial problems would be resolved. At the moment our only problem seemed to be in interpreting the time-table.

"There is a train that runs on even days that fall on odd dates, and on odd days that fall on even dates," I said, tracing the minute hieroglyphics with my finger. "But unfortunately it is a military express from Southampton direct to Yulebe, and only stops in London to discharge arms. Besides, it has the notation M-W-F listed above, which I frankly do not understand."

"Milk, Wine, Food," replied Homes curtly, reading the list over my shoulder. "It has a combination restaurant car and bar, that is all. Here is one on the Tewksbury Line that goes to Hoolbe, Surrey, which is within kissing distance of Yulebe, and from there we might possibly get an omnibus."

"But that one is annotated T-T-S. What can that mean, Homes?"

"Most probably, Tewksbury Temperance Society, indicating that on that train the bar is closed. You will note, Watney, that much thought has gone into the preparation of this schedule, for the trains that go on week-days other than Sunday run only on alternate afternoons, except in August. Had I the time, I am positive that I could solve this particular code, but wishing to return as quickly as possible I suggest you arrange a hansom for us to-morrow!"

The following morning, therefore, found us racing through the lovely Surrey landscape, with Homes leaning back negligently humming a Bartok tympany concerto while I studiously noted the various public houses along our route to clearly mark our return.

It was a most pleasant journey, and before we knew it we had entered the environs of Yulebe, and moments later were rolling up the carriage-way of the McGrogger domain. The house lay well back in a well-ordered garden—a tall, thin edifice of medium squatness, neatly combining neo-antique architecture with old-modern. With a sigh of resignation, Homes descended from the carriage and we made our way up the marble steps to the ornate entrance.

"You might check the cellar and wine stocks, Watney, while I make an inspection of the upper rooms," said Homes, pocketing the key and eyeing the rococo hallway with disgust. "There seems to be no visible sign of forced entry, so I should judge that a few hours at the most should see us through.

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In accordance with these instructions, I descended immediately to the lower levels of the mansion, finding myself in a huge subterranean gallery lined on both sides with bottle-racks which were filled from floor to arched roof. I had time to inspect but two bottles, and was engaged in removing the foil of a third, when a faint cry made me pause and listen closely. There was no doubt—Homes was calling me, and even the thinness of his voice, muffled by the heavy floor, could not disguise the excitement of his tone.

I hurried up the cellar steps and dashed along the hallway, pausing only to arm myself with a stout cane from the umbrella stand, should Homes need physical help. But when I arrived at the room from whence his voice was issuing, I found Homes alone, albeit his previous ennui had completely disappeared. He was striding up and down in great agitation, and his firm step and glistening eye told me he had unwittingly come upon a crime that gripped his imagination.

"Watney!" he cried at sight of me. "It is well that we came and came when we did! What say you of this dark deed?" And he swept his thin strong hands about him as he spoke.

I looked about me in befuddlement, for in all honesty I could note nothing out of the ordinary. The room in which we found ourselves had apparently been transformed into an art gallery, and a small plaque mounted upon the open door announced that the room contained the McGrogger Abstract Art Collection. The walls themselves were covered with paintings, but it was not until Homes spoke again that I realized the cause of his perturbation.

"Vandalism!" he cried, his pointing finger shaking with the strength of his emotion. "Despicable vandalism!"

It was then that I saw the truth of his statement, for the canvases had been criss-crossed with bars of paint, and triangles and circles had been smeared haphazardly across some; one had been brushed with a dull base and spattered with little blue and pink dots, while several exhibited splashes of colour of the most atrocious hues.

"Homes!" I ejaculated, struck with horror at this vile deed. "This is appalling! What do you plan to do?"

"Do?" Homes thundered, his strong voice resolute with fury. "I shall trace this fiend to the ends of the earth and see that he receives his just desserts! I shall not rest until I bring him to justice! Watney, in our carriage you will find my kit. Please bring it at once while I begin my search for clues."

A moment later Homes was on his hands and knees, his magnifying glass in hand, as he peered intently at the nap of the Oriental carpet. A moment later he was at

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the windows, after which he turned to me in deep disgust.

"The window-catches are open," he announced. "Anyone could have entered and left at will. However, even the most astute criminal must leave some sign of his passing, and I pride myself that few are better at noting these signs than Schlock Homes! I suggest you return to your chores below, Watney, for I shall be some time here."

It was fully an hour before I returned. I had been unable to completely finish my inspection of the McGrogger wine stocks, but I flatter myself that I had no need for shame at my progress. I entered the gallery to find Homes sunk in thought in a deep chair which he had drawn up to front the defaced paintings.

"We progress, Watney," he remarked, his gaze still fixed upon the canvases before him. "A picture of this vandal begins to form."

"But how, Homes?" I protested, bewildered. "I see nothing here to give any indication whatsoever as to the person responsible for this outrage!"

Homes smiled grimly. "Yet there are many clues here, Watney. It is quite obvious, for example, that the man who defaced these priceless paintings is of medium height and a Latin whose origins most probably were in Spain. I should judge that he has probably dabbled in art and been disappointed with the results. He is in excellent physical shape, and without doubt was once an athlete. He is also, without question, quite bald."

"Really, Homes!" I exclaimed. "This is plainly impossible! This time you are pulling my leg."

"By no means, my dear Watney! In good time you shall know all, but actually the facts I have revealed speak for themselves. Unfortunately, I fear that this information by itself is insufficient for us to properly identify our culprit. There must be more; there must be more!" And springing to his feet, Homes began pacing before the ruined canvases, his bony hands locked behind him, his sharp features twisted in fierce concentration. I waited patiently, until with a sad shake of his head he turned to me with a sigh of defeat.

"I fear there is little more to be learned here at this time, Watney," he said. "Let us return to London and Bagel Street. There are enquiries to be put into motion, and possibly the fresh air on our return will stimulate some further thought."

During our drive back to London, Homes remained hunched in one corner of the carriage, his eyes closed, and his fingers tented in that pose that has always indicated to me his desire to be left alone with a problem. He did not speak until our cab had turned into Bagel Street and pulled up at our doorway.

"It occurs to me, Watney," he said, as we descended and made

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our way up the stairs to our rooms, "that it would be of the greatest value in identifying our criminal were we able to determine if he were right- or left-handed. In addition to the other facts which we now possess, it could well be the factor to conclusively pin-point our man."

"But, Homes," I protested, "how is it possible to determine this?"

"By copying his method, Watney. Of course! By copying his method!" At the thought, all signs of dejection slipped from my friend's face, and as he slipped into his dressing-gown he was his old enthusiastic self once again. "Watney, certainly we must have an old piece of canvas about the apartment. If you would please manage to locate one, we shall get right to it."

I rummaged through our closets until I uncovered a bit of torn sail that I had long intended to repair, but as I delivered it to Homes another thought struck me.

"One problem, Homes," I said. "We have no paints, or colours of any nature."

"For our purpose we have no need for formal oils. If you would be so kind as to ask Mrs. Essex for the use of her cupboard, I am sure we can unearth sufficient materials for our experiment."

I returned in a few minutes with catsup, a bottle of mustard, some clothes blueing, a dish of egg-white, and a small jar of chutney mixed with Worcester sauce. Homes had stretched the piece of sail tautly across the fireplace and was smoothing the edges with an old clothes-brush.

"Excellent!" said he in high spirits, as I laid my booty upon the sideboard. "Now, Watney, my plan is as follows: using these make-shift colours, I shall cover one part of the canvas in the same furious manner as the vandal using solely my right hand. The balance I shall treat in similar fashion, but using only my left hand. Expert examination of the result could well determine if dexterity can be proven through this method. I suggest you stand well back, Watney, for I note you are wearing your new tweed."

The next few moments were a blur as Homes, his enthusiasm aroused to fever pitch, attacked the canvas from all angles. Within a very short time he stood panting over the finished product, which bore but a superficial resemblance to the vandalized paintings in the McGrogger manor. Homes carefully wiped his hands upon his dressing-gown, and falling back to my side of the room, studied the smeared sail in silent contemplation for several minutes. Finally he nodded his head in satisfaction.

"Right-handed, I should definitely state," he remarked. "We shall, of course, require expert opinion and to this end I suggest, Watney, that you take this down at once to old Mr. Braigis at Crustie's Gallery for his conclusions. I shall continue

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with other lines of investigation, for I am determined to bring this vandal to justice quickly!"

As I left the room, Homes was reaching to the book-shelf for a reference volume, and immediately became so engrossed that he barely nodded his farewell.

When I returned from Crustie's Gallery, Homes interrupted his reading only long enough to lift an eyebrow in interrogation. I explained that old Mr. Braigis had been out, but that I had left the canvas requesting a telegraphed opinion upon the morrow.

"No matter," said Homes, in that insufferably superior manner he so often adopted when the conclusion of a case was approaching. "I believe I am well on the trail of the miscreant, and so if you will excuse me, Watney, I shall continue my researches." He buried himself again in the reference book, and when I finally retired he was still too engrossed to even acknowledge my good night.

The following morning I awoke a bit disgruntled at the cavalier treatment Homes had accorded me the previous evening; but as soon as I reached the breakfast room, the warm smile of my friend across the table soon dispelled my black mood. He refused to discuss the case until my appetite had been satisfied, but as I lit my first after-breakfast pipe, he turned to me with a glint of humour in his fine eyes.

"Are you still angry with me?" he enquired.

"Really, Homes," I replied, smiling despite myself. "At times you are quite impossible!"

"Like the solution to this mystery?" he asked, smiling broadly. "Really, Watney, you should know me well enough by now to forgive my bad manners when I am at a complete loss for the solution to a problem. However, this condition, I am glad to state, no longer prevails. Come, I have a cab awaiting us, and as we drive out to McGrogger's Manor I shall subtly ask your forgiveness by explaining this most interesting case!"

"But, Homes," I cried. "If you know who the miscreant is, should you not first take steps to see to his apprehension?"

The smile faded for a moment from Homes's visage. "Unfortunately I fear it is too late," he replied. "I have made enquiries and it appears he is beyond our jurisdiction. However, I believe I can guarantee Sir Angus that he will never vandalize another painting in England!"

Once we were seated in our hansom and rolling swiftly along the avenue leading to the Great North Road, Homes lighted a cigar and began to speak.

"You will recall, my dear Watney, that on our last visit to McGrogger Manor I stated certain particulars regarding our miscreant. That he was an athlete was evident

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—many of his colours were obviously not applied either by palette-knife or brush; they could only have been thrown. The lack of over-toss, or slop, as it is known in art circles, on either frame or wall indicated the excellence of his aim—a sure sign of the trained athlete. From this fact I was also able to deduce his height. A taller or shorter man would have tended to splash, due to the changed angle of incidence. The perfect impingement gives the height of the throwing arm as being equal to the distance from the floor to the center of the canvas.

"The temperament which could lead a man to deface paintings in a fit of pique at his own deficiencies could only be Latin. His selection of colour indicated his subconscious had led him to the hues most familiar in his youth. The predominance of the reds and oranges, coupled with the Latin background, clearly indicated a person raised in Spain."

"But, Homes," I objected. "Why must it have been a painter at all? Could it not have been simply a passing vagabond?"

Homes shook his head. "The normal vandal tends to slash, rather than to daub. Only a person trained to some extent in art would consider overpainting a picture a greater desecration than actually cutting the canvas!"

As I nodded agreement at this astute observation, Homes continued: "His excellent physical condition I deduced from the fact that he was able to vandalize these pictures in a period of time which of necessity must have been proscribed, for he could never be certain when someone might enter. Even smearing one small bit of sail caused me to become breathless, so that the overpainting of so many in a brief time must certainly have called for the utmost in physical endurance."

"But, Homes," I said, fascinated by this dissertation, "how could you possibly have concluded that he was bald?"

"Quite easily, my dear Watney! Certainly a man of the background and temperament which we have described, faced with the imagined need for destroying a large number of paintings in the minimum of time, would be led to tear his hair; yet the most minute examination of the carpet nap failed to reveal the slightest sign of ruptured follicle! Our only conclusion must be that our vandal lacked the wherewithal."

"And with this you were able to identify him?"

"With this and his right-handedness," replied Homes, smiling modestly. "He is a frustrated painter named Passo Picablo, and the answers I have received from the continental police indicate that he must have made good his escape. The Sûreté informs me he is definitely known to be in Paris!"

"But are you positive, Homes?"

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I asked anxiously. "Your evidence is, after all, largely circumstantial."

"There can be no doubt. I have brought with me a book which makes reference to the early life of this vandal, and once we have the damaged pictures before us, I am sure that I can convince you of the correctness of my analysis. But here we are at McGrogger's Manor. Come, Watney, allow me to complete this exposition where it began —in the gallery."

Leading me quickly along the hall, Homes opened the door to the exhibit-room, and we passed within. The mutilated pictures faced us as we entered, and Homes paused before the canvas spangled with blue and pink dots.

"The final proof, Watney!" he cried, pointing to the picture.

"You mean these blue and pink dots?" I replied, much puzzled.

"That was his secret, Watney! They are not dots. They are *periods!*"

"But what is the difference between a dot and a period, Homes?" I asked, now completely befuddled.

"In all honesty I am not enough of an art connoisseur to know," said Homes earnestly. "But there can be no question that these are periods, and not dots! Nor can there be any question that they identify our culprit beyond all possibility of error! Read this!"

He thrust the book beneath my eyes, and as I read, my admiration for the analytical powers of my friend rose to new heights. A clearly marked passage read: "Passo Picablo is best known and can most readily be identified by his blue and pink periods."

The following morning Homes appeared at our breakfast table as I was in the act of opening our morning mail. He seated himself opposite me, and as he reached for a rasher of bacon he enquired genially, "Is there anything in the morning post which might be of interest to two idle investigators this fine morning?"

"A letter from Crustie's Gallery," I replied, reading the missive.

"Now that the case is closed," remarked Homes, helping himself to the remains of the chutney, "their opinion is of no importance."

"I am not so sure," I said, handing him a cheque that had been enclosed. "Old Mr. Braigis is offering three hundred guineas for the canvas I left there yesterday. He further states that in his opinion your controlled feeling of orderly chaos, exhibited in the threnody of selective contemporary media, offers you a great future. What does he mean, Homes?"

"There is undoubtedly a mystery here," replied Schlock Homes, fingering the cheque thoughtfully. "But at the moment I do not believe I am inclined to delve into the matter too deeply!"

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YO-HO-HO AND A BOTTLE OF—DEATH

by GORDON GASKILL

(*continued from page 53*)

Hillman tried to find out if somebody else might conceivably have known about the treasure.

"Could somebody have overheard you talking about it on the boat?" he asked.

"A boat's pretty private," I said. "You can't sneak up to a window."

"You can swim up," he pointed out. "That first night you got here—and no telling how many times before—there must have been a lot of talk about treasure. In the night, who'd see anybody swim alongside and listen?"

"It's possible," Alex said. "A lot of people do swim around here at night."

I mentioned the swimmer who had been hanging on to Paladin's ladder, and Alex said that wasn't uncommon. Also, I mentioned that good-looking Frenchman with the mustache who kept bowing at Alex.

"Bob!" she exclaimed. "You ought to be ashamed."

"Well, I'm not. He was in Calvi when Paladin was there, and now he's here. If he's in the clear, he's got nothing to worry about."

Heinemann had me describe him, and I did the best I could.

Von Hellberg said, "There is one thing. We talked, of course, always in English. Here most people are French, and could not understand English."

Hillman brushed that aside. "You speak English. Your French yachting friend speaks English. Those two fish-lovers in the castle, they *are* English. And English isn't a local dialect any more. Even Heinemann here knows a little of it."

The French lieutenant grinned.

"As far as I can see," Hillman said, "the murderer was a good swimmer who speaks English and has a submarine gun. Which seems to describe about everybody in Corsica."

He and Heinemann took the dinghy ashore to look around. They visited the other boats in the cove, climbed to the castle, and talked to the French campers. When they got back I asked Hillman if they'd found anything.

"Not much," he said. "Heinemann got a few names he wants to check on. The French are great on dossiers, and sometimes it pays off. He's going to take the boat back to Calvi and telephone Paris from there. This phone here is impossible."

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The French lieutenant got in the boat, saying he'd be back tomorrow, or next day at the latest.

"Tomorrow," Hillman said. "I want to take a look at the place where this all happened."

"So do I," said von Hellberg soberly.

"And I," I said. "I want to look around that cave And that rock."

But again the weather was against us. The southwest wind which had balked Rocky when he was alive came back to balk us in hunting for his murderer.

Hillman was determined to go anyway, but before the dinghy even got out of the cove, it was obvious the sea was too rough for it. He tried to get a fisherman to take us out in a bigger, stouter boat, but it was no go. He finally agreed that there was nothing to do but wait.

It was a dismal day. Luncheon was gloomy, silent. The wind got even worse, and it built up a swell that worked its way into the cove despite the protecting point. Normally Paladin would swing so as to face into the wind, but the harbor was so small that all boats had bow and stern anchors out to keep from swinging into one another. This held us parallel to the swell, and the motion was awful. It began to get me a little.

Hillman had it even worse. He ate nothing and said almost nothing.

About four the wind seemed to be dying a little. But the swell became even worse, for now the wind did not iron it out so much, and Paladin rolled wildly.

"We're fools!" I said. "We could take the dinghy ashore and get away from this rolling!"

"Why didn't you think of this before?" Hillman groaned. "Why didn't I? Let's get going."

"Wait." It was von Hellberg. He seemed curiously excited, and spoke more precisely than usual. "The wind is abating," he said. "I think that before long the sea will be calm enough that the dinghy can make it—with only one man aboard."

"Kurt, you're mad!" Alex said. "It's still far too rough."

"For a full dinghy, yes," he agreed. "But soon, with only one man, it is buoyant enough to make it. And, forgive me if I seem to boast, I am not a bad sailor."

"But the swell!"

"At sea, it means nothing. Near the shore, true, I must be careful as it breaks on the rocks. But I can anchor the dinghy well out and, once in the water, I can take care of myself."

I remembered how, just a few inches under the surface, the water was calm even when there were waves overhead.

But Alex persisted. "What good would it do? Why not wait until tomorrow? If anything was going to be swept away today, it's already gone."

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"Perhaps," von Hellberg said. "But there is still some chance. And any chance is worth taking."

During all this Hillman had said nothing. Absorbed in his seasickness, he seemed to pay little attention. Now he said, "Let's stop talking and get going. Alex can stay here if she wants to."

"Then may I go?" the German asked formally.

"I don't care what you do," Hillman said. "Only get me on shore!"

Von Hellberg really knew boats. The way he put us ashore, the dinghy could have been an egg and he wouldn't have cracked it. He waved at us and pulled back to Paladin. We saw him collecting his gear.

"Let's walk up to the castle," Hillman said. "You get a good view of the sea from there." It was more a command than an invitation.

We climbed up to it, and I yelled for Campbell or Tupper. Nobody answered.

"They were here yesterday," Hillman said.

"We can go in," I said. "They said to and, besides, it isn't their castle."

The room they lived in seemed a lot barer than before. I realized their bedrolls and mattresses were gone. So were their submarine guns.

"Funny," I said. "It's too rough to do any shooting today."

"Let's go up to the parapet, or whatever you call it," Hillman said.

We climbed up and looked out once again on the superb seascape. Just nosing out of the cove into the open sea was the dinghy, with von Hellberg in it. He was making slow going.

"We'll beat him," Hillman said.

I must have looked bewildered.

"How seasick do you think I was?" Hillman asked me. "Bad, yes, but not that bad. I was tickled to death he wanted to go off alone." He pulled out a small pencil-drawn map. "I copied this off the chart. It shows a path that goes pretty near the place. Then we can cut across country and get there before he does."

"So what?" I demanded. "You think he did it?"

"Cops think everybody did it," he double-talked. "Anyway, I want to watch what he does while he thinks he's alone. Also, I want to see if it's possible for anybody to get close enough from the land side."

I shrugged and went with him. The chart was deceptive. A sort of path existed, all right, but it was more mountain-climbing than walking.

"We should have started a long time before he did," Hillman panted. "He could beat us there swimming."

At last we reached the sea, but a little south of the exact spot, which was hidden by a rocky outcrop-

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ping. There was no sign of von Hellberg from where we were. It took us nearly fifteen minutes to get directly above the place itself. Finally I saw the rock that looked like a turtle.

Hillman grunted in disappointment. "You were right. Nobody could get down there from the land."

For a good two hundred yards in either direction the cliff was absolutely vertical, without a handhole. The rock fell straight into the sea, and the swell crashed at its foot like thunder.

We inched closer to the edge, to see better. It was a good twenty yards to the sea—an impossible shot with a submarine gun.

"There's von Hellberg," Hillman said. "He made it, after all."

He was floating, head-down in the water, near the turtle-shaped rock. It seemed to me he was dangerously near it, but I knew he could take care of himself in the water. It suddenly occurred to me that I couldn't see the anchored dinghy.

And just then Hillman shouted, "Look!"

A wave picked up the German and smashed him with tremendous force against the rock. He did nothing to resist. The wave ebbed, dragging him seaward. Another wave caught him and flung him, a little sideways, against the rocky cliff itself. Then another . . .

There was a horrible fascination, watching, and I hardly heard Hillman say. "He was probably dead when we saw him."

Still we watched. There was absolutely nothing we could do. After seven years Kurt von Hellberg was back with his ship. Or near her.

After we worked our way back to Girolata we got Du Bouleau to take us back to the place in his motor launch. It was still pretty tricky getting close enough to the body. We did it when an ebbing wave carried it a little offshore.

It was hardly a body any more after the pounding. But the gold signet ring engraved with the arms of his family was still on what was left of a hand.

"After that," Hillman grimaced, "an autopsy won't show a thing. He could have been stabbed with a sword, shot with a harpoon, or blown up with a cannon. It's all the same now."

We found the dinghy smashed to bits, pounding against the rocks not far away. Du Bouleau said we could use his dinghy as long as we liked; he'd take the launch.

We hadn't told Alex before, but we couldn't hide it any longer. Again we put a canvas-covered body on the stern.

"Oh, no! *No!*" she breathed, horrified.

"And it's my fault," Hillman said roughly. "My little experiment."

"He wanted to go," she reasoned,

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even in her horror. "And you must have had good reasons."

"Not good enough," he said bitterly. "Sure, I thought maybe he had done it."

It seemed to me no time to be discussing it, and I said so.

"I know how you feel," Hillman said, "but every hour we wait will make it harder."

Alex objected, "But he was the one who found the compass ring and brought it to us. If he'd wanted to double-cross us, he'd have kept it quiet; wouldn't he?"

"Maybe," Hillman said. "But maybe it was a plant. Maybe he decided there was no reason to cut you all in on it. If he'd found out where the wreck was, he could come back later and get it all. And he was swimming nearest to Rocky. You probably wouldn't have seen him swim over to shoot him. And Rocky wouldn't have suspected anything until too late."

"Besides," Hillman continued, "this still doesn't prove that it wasn't von Hellberg."

"What do you need for proof?" I said.

"Keep your shirt on," he said. "I'm making it up as I go along. Suppose he did it. Suppose he went back to hide something before we gave the place a real once-over?"

"Hide what?" Alex demanded.

"That other arrowhead—Rocky's own—the one the killer unscrewed after shooting Rocky. That's got to be somewhere. The killer wouldn't keep it."

"That'd be too easy," I pointed out. "All you'd have to do is swim out a couple of hundred yards and drop it. It'd go down so deep that nobody could ever find it."

"But the murderer didn't have all day," Hillman reasoned. "It takes time to swim two hundred yards out and back. And he had a lot of other things to do, too—changing those arrowheads and getting away. Seems to me he'd drop the head in the nearest good hiding place, maybe in a rock crevice, and get out of there fast. Then, later, he was afraid we'd find the missing point if we really made a search."

"So what?" I said. "We still couldn't trace it to anybody. It was Rocky's own point, and there couldn't be fingerprints. Furthermore, von Hellberg knew too much about the sea to let himself get caught. The waves look bad from outside, but when you're in the water you can fight them better than you think. And the dinghy couldn't have gone ashore accidentally. Once her anchor catches in a rock—and it can't fail there—it couldn't possibly break loose."

"So maybe it was suicide," Hillman said. "Maybe he got remorseful about what he had done."

"Look," I said. "If he was tough enough to kill Rocky, he'd be tough enough not to crack up so soon. Let's not ask too much of co-

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incidence. Two men are killed within three days at the same place near a treasure. Why talk about suicide and accident?"

"You're wasting your time on tax law," Hillman said. "Keep going. Tell me who killed him."

That stopped me. "It could have been anybody," I admitted. "It could have been me—I was swimming near Rocky. But not near Kurt, that's true. That lets me out. Now, Alex—maybe it was Alex."

Hillman spread out his hands. "Look," he said, "forget the sarcasm. Let's keep on the track."

"Okay," I said. "Maybe it was Du Bouleau, but he was here, on his boat, both times. Maybe it was the two Englishmen who are supposed to be studying fish—not a bad cover, by the way—and who are out today somewhere with the guns, on a day when it's too rough to use them. Maybe it was that French Romeo who followed Alex or Rocky or von Hellberg from Calvi."

"And there's something else," I went on. "There's too much French-German business in this whole thing. I can't believe they're so fast to forgive and forget."

"Spare us the essay," Hillman grunted. "Get down to cases."

"I haven't got a case," I retorted. "I just say there's something funny about it. In Corsica, a German is knocked overboard and is rescued by a Frenchman. Right here in Girolata there's a French restaurant keeper who hates Germans so much we didn't dare let him know Kurt was one."

"So what?" Hillman said.

"I don't know," I confessed. "I'm fumbling in the dark, but there's something there. After everything that's happened, there's no sense thinking that Kurt's falling overboard in Calvi was an accident. He was knocked over, either by a Corsican who had a grudge against him, or by somebody who knew about the treasure."

Hillman was thinking hard. "At least that lets Du Bouleau out," he said. "You don't knock a guy overboard with one hand and save him with the other."

Alex's forehead was wrinkled. "I don't see how it could have had anything to do with the treasure," she said.

"Why not?" Hillman demanded.

"Maybe I'm not thinking clearly," she said, "but if it was somebody who knew where the treasure was, why didn't he go and get it long before we arrived in Corsica? And if it was somebody who knew there *was* a treasure, but didn't know exactly where it was, wouldn't he have let Kurt guide us to it—and *then* step in?"

"Maybe that's exactly what happened," Hillman pointed out.

"But then why try to kill Kurt in Calvi, before we even started?" she said.

"Anyway," Hillman said, "it

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proves one thing. It proves that somebody recognized von Hellberg. Somebody French or German, male or female, devil or angel. But somebody recognized him and had a reason to kill him."

"And yet," I pointed out, "it was Rocky who was killed first."

"That could have been a mistake," Hillman said. "He might have thought it was von Hellberg. In the water you say people look pretty much alike."

We were getting nowhere.

I hadn't paid much attention to what was going on around the boat and the cove, but now I noticed a swimmer coming nearer to us.

"Look who's here," I said to Alex. "Alphonse is back again."

The Frenchman with the mustache swam straight up to Paladin and hooked an arm around our swimming ladder. It's hard to bow in the water, but he ducked his head anyway.

"I'm going to have a talk with him," I said, getting up. "This is carrying it too far, or too near."

"Don't," Alex said. "He doesn't look like a killer. He looks plain scared."

She was right. His eyes were pleading, and he seemed embarrassed. None of us understood French enough to get what he was saying, but I thought I made out words that sounded like "pardon" and "apology."

It was a ridiculous situation. Finally we had to call on Du Bouleau again. He listened carefully, and choked with laughter.

"He says," Du Bouleau explained at last, "that the police have been making his life miserable with questions. He says he is very sorry he bothered you, that he meant no harm, and that he hopes you will accept his most humble apologies."

"Ask him why he did it," I told Du Bouleau.

The answer came back a moment later: "Because, he says, he has never seen any woman so lovely in the world."

Alex was scarlet. And laughing. "Tell him," she managed to say, "that no woman can really be angry at such a reason." She looked at me. "And tell him that he is not bad-looking, himself."

Du Bouleau translated, while Alex was giving him a dazzling smile. The Frenchman looked happy, ducked his head again, and swam off, relieved.

"There goes another suspect," Hillman grunted.

"He wasn't much of a suspect," Alex said. "Just because he looked twice at me."

"I can stand just so much of this," Hillman said. "I'm going ashore. Maybe somebody can give me a line on where the two Englishmen went today."

"What language do you propose to use?" Alex asked pointedly.

"That's right," he exclaimed. "Funny Heinemann isn't back yet.

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Probably had trouble getting through to London."

"London?" I asked, surprised. "I thought he was calling Paris."

"First, yes. Then London. The fish experts are English; English files are kept by Scotland Yard; Scotland Yard is in London. Get it?"

In the end he fell back on Du Bouleau again. They went ashore for about a half hour, and when they came back it was obvious they'd learned nothing about the two Englishmen.

"But the fishermen are going to keep a lookout," Hillman said. "They can't be far away, and from the stuff they took with them it's plain they're somewhere on the shore."

Dinner wasn't much. All of us were on edge and we kept expecting Heinemann back any minute. Without saying so, we all thought that somehow he would come back with the answers.

By midnight he still hadn't come.

We went to bed finally, but I couldn't sleep. There was still a small swell, enough to roll Paladin slightly, and I wasn't used to the motion. Aside from that, I had too much to think about. I suddenly had to have a cigarette. In order not to disturb the others I went out on deck.

Except for the stars, there was no light anywhere. The only sound was the faint creaking of the yachts as they moved to the swell.

I heard the faint, muffled sound of a motor, and after a few minutes, looking seaward, I saw tiny red and green running lights. I thought it might be Heinemann coming back from Calvi in a commandeered boat. The lights got nearer, and finally I saw that it was Du Bouleau. Murder or no murder, he went on with his night fishing anyway.

I didn't feel like talking to anybody, and made no move as his launch went past, only a few feet away. He tied up to Xanadu, his cabin lights went on for a few minutes, and then there was darkness again.

I flicked my cigarette overboard and stared at the spot where it hissed into the sea. The sea, I thought, was the enemy. At least, the accomplice. For, in some way that escaped us, the sea had sheltered the killer.

Again I came to the frustrating paradox. No one could have shot him from shore. And no other swimmer could have been around without our knowing it. And no one could have stayed under water so long without coming up for air, unless he were a fish.

Then I remembered. And remembering one thing, it shed light on another fact, a forgotten scrap of conversation. And this, in turn, like a chain reaction, illuminated yet another fact.

Suddenly everything seemed clear. There were spots in the pat-

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tern, but the pattern still held.

I crept below softly to Hillman's berth. I put my hand over his mouth to keep him from making any noise as I shook him. He struggled, almost knocking me across the cabin.

"For Pete's sake," I whispered, "it's just me. I've got an idea."

We went out on deck, and by the time I finished telling him my theory, he was wide-awake.

"Could be," he nodded. "In fact, it sounds pretty good. It's sure worth trying." Then he grimaced: "I hope it works out better than my last experiment."

We had let Alex sleep, but of course, in the morning, we had to let her in on the plan. After all, she was part of it.

"I don't like it," she said immediately.

"What have we got to lose?" Hillman pointed out. "Except maybe Tillson, here." He grinned at me.

"Please!" she started. She looked worried, and this I didn't mind.

"It'll be all right," I said. "If I'm wrong, there won't be anybody there. If I'm right, he can't hurt me, because I'll know what to expect. And as far as I can see, it's the only way to settle this."

"But why you?" she persisted. "You're not in the C.I.D."

"Thanks, pal," Hillman said sardonically, "and you're right. It's really my baby, but I can't swim worth a nickel."

She had nothing to say to that. Then I asked her, "Rocky talked once about trying out an underwater spotlight. Do you have any idea where it is?"

"Sure," she said. She got it for me. It was a small spotlight with a pistol-grip, entirely encased in soft black rubber, with an off-on switch you work under the rubber. "And I'll need some wire," I said, "a lot of wire."

I fixed up the light, and we loaded the dinghy up, putting in all the usual gear for two people, plus a storage battery from the boat. We worked on the seaward side of Paladin so that nobody ashore or on the other boats could see what we were doing.

The trickiest part was getting Hillman into the dinghy without anyone's seeing him. It was no time to laugh, but it looked funny to see him squirming on the dinghy floor.

Then Alex and I got in. She dropped a towel over Hillman and then a square life-preserver cushion.

"What a way to go to sea!" he moaned. "And with my stomach!"

We didn't say much as we putt-putted across the Golfe de Girolata. Finally the Ile de Gargalo came into view.

"Now," I said, killing the motor close to shore," I hope somebody *does* see us." From any distance it looked as if Alex and I were alone in the dinghy.

Nothing stirred. We were a good

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500 yards south of the cave and the turtle-shaped rock. We had to kill time so that the killer could see us and get there before we did. And if I was right, he couldn't move very fast.

I saw Alex putting on her flippers and I shook my head. "Unh-unh. Not you."

"Of course me," she said coolly. "I'd look awfully funny if I didn't go in, too. I always did before. Besides, it isn't dangerous here."

There was no arguing with her. "Okay," I said, "but for heaven's sake, stay close to me!"

We slid into the water. We both had our guns, of course, and I shot a fat *sard* almost without thinking about it. I came on him cornered in the rocks, and I couldn't miss. As I pressed the trigger, I found myself wishing I were shooting at something else, somebody else.

I pulled the *sard* off the barbs and strung it on the wire game belt around my waist. I looked at Alex, and she had her right thumb and forefinger curled into the circular "nice work" sign. "What a girl," I thought, "to be joking at a time like this!"

After fiddling around for about an hour, we climbed back into the dinghy. The sea and land were still barren of life or movement.

"The last lap," I said, pulling the motor starter cord. I steered the dinghy up until it lay about twenty yards off the mouth of the cave. We didn't anchor it yet. After I got into the water they were to let it drift back and anchor it so that the stern just cleared the shore. That way I could use every possible inch of electric cord. I had no idea how deep the cave might be.

"And be careful," I whispered. "If anything should happen to me, he'll probably come out and try to upset the dinghy. He'll think Alex is alone in it, and she would be the last of us four."

"I'll clobber him," she said simply. "I'm not blind. I can see him coming. I've got a harpoon, too, and he won't have one by then. He'll have shot it at . . . oh!"

"It won't be like that," I told her.

"And don't forget," Hillman whispered. "I'm here, too. And my gun doesn't shoot arrows. As soon as anything happens I'm going to get up."

"It'll be okay then," I said.

I slipped into the water, my heart pounding. Then I had so much to do that I had no time to remember how scared I was.

It was awkward swimming with both the cocked gun and the spotlight, besides dragging the electric wire. But from the dinghy they were paying out the wire smoothly. With the flippers I could move along pretty well. The flippers were a blessing, for I might need all the speed I could get.

There was nothing suspicious about the underwater parts of the turtle-shaped rock. It went cleanly down to the sea bottom, with no

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conceivable hiding place for a killer of any kind.

Then I came slowly to the cave.

It was like a lot of others along the coast. The top of the opening was only a foot or two above the water line, and when waves or a swell came in, the opening was filled up for a few seconds.

But below water I saw that the opening was much bigger, perhaps eight feet deep in all, with a bottom of rounded small pebbles. The cave went into the cliff at an angle, so that the one side of it was more exposed than the other to the southwesterly storms. This meant that the right-hand side of the cave was swept clean, while the left was cluttered with boulders, some of them big enough to hid five men.

Not much light came in the entrance, and I could not see more than perhaps ten yards inside. The rest was lost in darkness. Going in was the worst. For a few seconds I would be outlined against the lighter water of the entrance, and thus be a perfect target. My heart started pounding again.

I never seemed to move so slowly until I got behind a big boulder. There I froze, letting my eyes get used to the dimness. I took a quick look out of water and was glad to see that the roof of the cave seemed well above water all the way back. This meant I could go anywhere and still breathe, without my tube hitting against the roof.

Then I put my head back under water. By now my eyes were as accustomed to the darkness as they ever would be. I could see shadowy boulders not far away, with completely dark pools behind them. I pulled gently on the electric wire, and as they let it out from the dinghy I coiled it carefully on the cave floor, so that it would run out freely without snagging.

When I had all the wire by me I pushed the switch. I was surprised to see how, in the clear water, it shot out a slightly diffused, yet strong beam, perhaps ten to fifteen yards long. I began moving the beam slowly from left to right, probing every shadow.

I saw him almost at once.

He crouched behind a boulder, flattening himself against the cave wall, trying to get away from the light. But he could not escape it. His gun was pointed toward me.

Even allowing for underwater magnification, I estimated he was at least ten yards away from me. And since the range of the guns, with any force or accuracy, was only five yards, I figured he could not shoot at me. Nor could I shoot at him. It was a strange feeling, two men, armed, within a few yards of each other, and helpless.

I kept the spot on his face, which was completely disguised by the breathing mask. I hoped it blinded him.

He was on the sea-bottom, completely independent of the surface, because of the tank he carried on

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his back, the tank of compressed air that would let him remain entirely underwater for one hour. And he need use it only when someone was coming. Otherwise, he would use the ordinary breathing tube at the surface.

He had a heavy leaden belt around his waist, to keep him at the sea-bottom when he wished. Aside from this and a pair of dark-blue trunks he was naked.

I should have gone back to the dinghy. Then, somehow, the three of us could have holed him up or figured out a way to force him out, when his compressed-air tank was exhausted.

But I stayed there, almost hypnotized. I could see the deadly trident arrow aimed at me, and the taut, powerful rubber cables of his gun. Then my heart nearly stopped, for I saw his gun had four cables, instead of two. Which meant that his gun had a far greater range than the five yards I had counted on. I kicked my flippers, in a panic of fear, and tried to get away, toward the cave entrance.

But not quite fast enough. Perhaps the spotlight had not blinded him as much as I thought; perhaps the light, diffused and reflected backward against me by the water, had outlined me; perhaps he merely fired at the light itself.

I saw the flash of the arrow shooting toward me, and felt a tearing in my right shoulder.

Convulsively, I reached with my free left hand and tore it loose. Only one barb had hit. I pulled savagely, and broke the string that attached the arrow to his gun.

My mind was working wildly. Now, it told me, he has no arrow left, and it will take him a while to reload, even if he has a spare. If you close in on him now . . .

In ducking, I had let the spotlight wander away from him. Now I turned it back on him and saw why he could afford to try a shot at me at such a distance: He had a second rifle, like the first, already loaded.

And he was moving toward me. I turned the spotlight off, dropped it, and swam toward the entrance.

But before I got there I stopped. I should have kept going, but I was angry—too angry to be sensible. I wanted to get this murderer who had killed Rocky.

And I realized that I could outswim him three times. With his laden belt and the tank on his back, he could only plod slowly along the sea-bottom. And I had only my gun to bother me.

I ducked down to the bottom of the cave and had no trouble finding the electric wire. Praying that the light would still work, I pulled it toward me, and soon had it in my hands again. When I pressed the switch it shot out its beam.

He was still coming at me—still well out of range, but closing in. I waited. When he came almost within range, I went back a yard or

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two. He came on stubbornly.

And so I played him, trying to tantalize him into shooting his second and last arrow. For I knew he could never permit me to leave the cave to get help.

The cave entrance was very near now. There was more light and, silhouetted against it, I made a good target for him. The spotlight was of little use now. The next time he advanced I waited a little longer, until he came a little nearer.

Desperately, he fired—and missed me completely. Then, disarmed, he turned immediately and headed back into the depths of the cave. Now I was the hunter, and I followed him, the spotlight trained on the tank on his back and the mask straps on his head.

Suddenly I realized that if he drew me far enough into the cave I might come to the end of the electric wire, and he might somehow escape me yet.

I swam faster, to within about three yards of him. I pointed my harpoon at his back, just below the compressed-air tank, and sighted carefully.

Just then he turned his head slightly, saw me, and put up his hands.

I could not press the trigger, much as I wanted to.

There was no way to talk to him, but with my gun I motioned him toward the entrance. I kept him well away from me. I wanted no grappling match.

Outside the cave he remained on the floor of the sea, while I floated on the surface near him. I dared not take my eyes off him, but I saw fleetingly the red bottom of the dinghy a few yards off. I motioned to him to take off the lead belt. He obeyed, and shot immediately to the surface.

I tore off my mask and shouted, "Don't let him get near the dinghy!"

Alex had her gun trained on him, and Hillman had his .45.

The man pulled off his mask.

Alex gasped. "It's one of the French sailors on the Xanadu!"

"French nothing!" I said. "Try him in German."

Hillman, ordering the man not to come too near, said, *"Kommen Sie nicht so nahe!"*

"Jawohl!" gasped the killer obediently.

We didn't trust him in the dinghy. Even tied up, he could have capsized it. Finally we threw him a life-preserver cushion with a long rope on it and towed him back on that.

It was too much of a load for the dinghy, and we barely snailed along. A fast fishing boat came into sight from the direction of Calvi, headed for Girolata.

"That's probably Heinemann now," Hillman said. We waved and shouted, but the other boat was pretty far out and they didn't see us.

It seemed like a year before we

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got back to Paladin, and my arm was throbbing painfully. The salt water didn't make it any better, and Alex washed it off with some of the drinking water.

It was Heinemann, all right. He was waiting on Paladin's deck as we came up. Fortunately, he was alone. As we turned in to the little cove, we had pulled the killer up close behind the dinghy, trying to hide him from people ashore.

Heinemann was delighted when we told him what had happened. "My congratulations, *monsieur*." He bowed to me formally, shaking my hand. "I regret I did not see it."

I managed to say, "Thank heavens, it's all over." I felt tired and drained.

"Not quite over," Hillman amended.

Then Heinemann told us what he had been able to discover.

"I told you," Hillman said to me. "That dossier stuff pays off sometimes."

"It is a help, yes," Heinemann said politely, "but it is not enough. It would be enough to direct our search, but it is not evidence. What *monsieur* has done"—he nodded to me—"is far better than any dossier. Now I," said Heinemann coldly, "shall have a word with this one." He spoke sharply in German to our prisoner, and motioned him to go below.

Alex and I started to follow, automatically, but Hillman shook his head.

"This is a stag party," he told Alex. "The French don't use the third degree; they use the fifth. It's not pretty."

We hid the dinghy, so that anybody just arriving wouldn't know we were back yet. Alex rowed it ashore, pushed it out of sight under the wooden deck, and swam back to Paladin.

About 3:30 we saw Du Bouleau's launch heading toward the cove from the opposite side of the bay. Hillman stayed on deck, but Alex and I disappeared below. Heinemann had the bound German in the forepeak.

Hillman gave a friendly wave when Du Bouleau came near, and the Frenchman steered alongside Paladin.

"Any luck today?" Hillman asked.

"One or two big ones," Du Bouleau smiled, holding them up. "And you, what luck do you have with your hunting? That is more important."

"Oh, we're getting along," Hillman replied vaguely. "Made a little progress today." Then, casually, he added, "How about a drink?"

"Thank you," Du Bouleau said. "I'd love one. And I'd like to hear what you've discovered."

He made his launch fast and came aboard. Hillman let him go first down the companionway. He was halfway down the steps before he saw Alex and me. His eyes changed, but only for an instant.

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"Back already?" he smiled.

Hillman's voice was different now. "I believe you know everybody," he said, "including— Okay, Heinemann."

The French lieutenant appeared with the sullen German. I was so interested in the expression on Du Bouleau's face that I forgot to watch the hand in his jacket. I heard only the shots, unbearably loud in the small cabin. Du Bouleau slumped and fell.

Hillman swore, and then said, "I tried to wing him. I didn't mean to kill him."

"I did." It was the precise voice of the French lieutenant, and now, for the first time, we saw he had a gun, too. "France will not miss him." Then he smiled at us. "As you saw, I shot in self-defense."

Certainly the strangest actor in the whole thing was the German killer, whose real name turned out to be Moeller. It was a name as ordinary in Germany as Smith is with us. And on the surface Moeller looked ordinary enough. He was of medium size, with thin, blond hair and watery blue eyes.

Yet somewhere inside him was a streak of madness, a kind of murderous fanaticism that Heinemann said was not unusual in the SS.

"He is one of those strange Germans," Heinemann said, "who is half lamb and half tiger."

As Heinemann talked to him, we saw a few flashes of the tiger. But mostly he was again the lamb, and it was hard to believe that this meek-seeming man had coolly killed hostages with his own hands during the war, had cooly machine-gunned twenty women, had coolly killed Rocky and then von Hellberg, and had tried to kill me.

Yet it had not been necessary to use the fifth degree, or the third, or any force at all on him to make him talk. As coolly as he had killed, he now decided that, since he had been caught red-handed, it was only by talking freely that he might escape the guillotine.

For he had, it seemed, a horror of the guillotine. In a way, that curious dread had been his downfall.

So he talked freely. With that, and Heinemann's dossier, we had no trouble fitting the whole thing together. I'd been basically right in my theory, but wrong on a lot of the details.

"In a way," I said to Alex, "it was your dinner that second night that set me off."

"Bless that dinner," she said, puzzled, "but I don't get it."

"Remember I asked you what ran the stove? You showed me the squat, blue tank of butane gas. I remembered I'd seen a much bigger tank, of a different shape, in a mahogany deck case that day Du Bouleau showed me around his boat. But then I vaguely assumed that since he had a much bigger boat, he'd have a bigger butane tank, too."

I'd forgotten about it until that

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night, smoking on deck, when I'd stared at the sea, wondering how it had protected the killer. I'd thought of a fish, and then realized that if the killer could somehow stay *under the surface* all the time, we would never see him.

That seemed impossible, of course, and then I remembered a casual remark of Rocky's in that fishing shop in Calvi. He'd mentioned that the French made a compressed-air outfit that let you walk underwater, independent of the surface, for an hour. He'd said it cost a lot of money, too.

Then Du Bouleau's launch came along, and it flashed into my mind that surely a man as rich as Du Bouleau would have one of the compressed-air sets.

That set me off. Rocky had said it was almost impossible to get the tanks recharged in Corsica, and then I remembered the big, different-looking tanks on Xanadu. They had been *pressure tanks,* and it wouldn't be butane, because Alex had said you can pick up refills anywhere.

So maybe the big tanks held compressed air—to recharge the small walking tanks.

Then I went wrong, for I was still thinking that Du Bouleau couldn't knowingly be in on it himself. For one thing, he had been on his boat when the murders happened. Most of all, he had rescued von Hellberg that time in Calvi.

It didn't add up to his being guilty. I thought maybe somebody else on his boat was using the tanks without his knowledge. And since the killer had to know about the treasure, and since the only other person who knew about it—we thought—was the missing SS sergeant, supposedly killed on the Russian front, I figured it must be he.

Heinemann's dossier would have set us straight on that. At least, it would have made us suspicious, for it showed that Du Bouleau was far from the open, friendly character he seemed.

He'd been part of the Nazi fifth column in France, and when Hitler rolled in, Du Bouleau became a big shot in the *Milice.* That was a sort of French Gestapo, and the real French hated it far worse even than the German one. Du Bouleau did liaison work between the French and German cutthroats, especially around the coasts, since he was a sailor.

He was in Corsica when the Allies attacked and retreated northward with the Nazis. He knew about the slush fund, having used it himself, and he knew also about the E-boat, and had even been on hand when Moeller got his Iron Cross for trying to save the money.

He stuck with the Germans to the end, retreating with them until it was all over. The Russians captured him and put him in an enormous P.W. cage in western Czechoslovakia, along with other Ges-

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tapo and SS men. It was a sort of death house, for the Russians didn't waste much time on those prisoners.

But Du Bouleau was French. And at that time all the Allied governments were clamoring to get their own war criminals back, to try them. The Russians were going through the motions of cooperating in those days, and they turned all the French renegades over to the French government for trial.

Moeller went with them, although he was German. In his meek, deadpan way he told us how it happened.

Du Bouleau had recognized him in the P.W. cage, and one day, after it was rumored the French were to be sent away, he came to Moeller with a proposition.

"I had nothing to lose," Moeller told us. "*Perhaps* to die in France, but *certainly* to die with the Russians. I went with him."

Du Bouleau was smart. He knew that he would be condemned back in France and certainly stripped of his fortune. But he thought that with delay he could get off with a light sentence. As for recouping his fortune, he thought of the E-boat and all her money. He realized that the E-boat was probably salvageable. All he needed was Moeller to guide him to the spot.

It wasn't hard to convince the Russians that Moeller was an Alsatian French, not a German. Things were mixed up in those days, and Du Bouleau swore up and down that Moeller was one of his men.

Back in France, things went pretty much the way Du Bouleau expected. He still had some money and he spent it in the right way. He got his trial delayed and delayed, for one reason or another, and his case didn't come up until late 1946. By that time the sentences for all renegades got lighter. He pleaded, like all the others, that Marshal Petain was the legal ruler of France, and that he had merely obeyed Petain's orders. Anyway, he got off with a light sentence: loss of national rights, confiscation of his fortune, and three years in prison.

Moeller hadn't been so lucky. He'd been tried almost at once, and got a heavier sentence, but the way it worked out they left prison within a few months of each other.

Like all Frenchmen, Du Bouleau still had some money stashed away. Not much, but enough to charter Xanadu. They got Moeller a fake *carte d'indentité and* they set off for Corsica.

Then came that Calvi business.

Moeller recognized von Hellberg immediately as the skipper of the lost E-boat. Du Bouleau nearly went out of his mind when he learned that von Hellberg was on the next boat. He realized at once that von Hellberg, as the skipper of the E-boat, was a far better guide than Moeller.

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They had a big row. Du Bouleau argued that they'd be better off following Paladin, let her lead them to the final area, and then cut in ahead of her. He said Moeller would have to keep out of sight, either on shore or on Xanadu, so von Hellberg wouldn't recognize him.

Moeller wouldn't have it. For one thing, he didn't trust Du Bouleau. Once separated, he was afraid Du Bouleau would hog everything for himself. He said there was only one solution: to kill von Hellberg. That would make sure he, Moeller, would not be recognized, and it would deprive Paladin of her guide.

Du Bouleau called him every kind of fool. He said that a murder would mean police, and that Xanadu couldn't stand a careful investigation. Also, he said that von Hellberg was too valuable to lose, and he made some nasty cracks about Moeller's value as a guide.

So Moeller went into his lamb act, but he kept watching Paladin. He got his chance that night when he saw von Hellberg alone, wrestling with the anchor. The boats were lying side by side, and he hit him on the head with a boathook. Then he jumped in after him, to make sure he was drowned.

But Du Bouleau had heard the splash and came out on deck. He knew at once what had happened, and dived in, too. He really did save von Hellberg. By this time other people had come up, and Moeller had swum away.

Anyway, the incident led to friendly relations between Paladin and Xanadu, which let Du Bouleau keep a close check on his rivals.

Then Kurt found that compass ring. Moeller didn't know exactly how Du Bouleau knew about it, but it wouldn't have been hard. Either he heard Kurt's excitement that night—the yachts were only a few yards apart—or he saw the compass ring itself when he came over for coffee that night. We weren't as careful as we might have been, never dreaming at that time there was a rival around.

It was then Du Bouleau decided on murder—but it couldn't look like murder. It had to look like an accident—anything else would mean an investigation, and that would be fatal to his plans.

He worked it out carefully. He knew we usually separated while searching, and he knew about the caves. All he had to do was lure one of us—it didn't make much difference which one—inside the cave.

He invented a sure-fire way to do that. He got an old piece of metal tubing, which might easily have come off a German boat. He figured that if one of us saw that lying near the entrance to the cave, wild horses couldn't keep us from going inside.

The question was, who would do the killing? Du Bouleau wasn't

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having any of it; he wanted to stay clear.

He reminded Moeller of the SS atrocities he had been mixed up in. One word to the authorities and Moeller would be arrested and most certainly executed. Du Bouleau artistically described what the guillotine was like.

Moeller caved in.

Du Bouleau stationed him as near as he could to where we were working, and Moeller camped out on the Ile de Gargalo itself, watching every move we made. He had two tanks with him. He walked on the sea-bottom to the cave, put down the piece of tubing as bait, and waited in the darkness until one of us got there. It happened to be Rocky, and he reacted exactly as Du Bouleau had figured. He picked up the tubing and pushed into the cave.

Then Moeller shot him, and if Rocky ever yelled out, the cave cut off the noise. Moeller calmly changed the arrow points, towed Rocky's body out into the sea, and walked back to his lair on the island, dumping Rocky's original arrow point and the tubing where they'd never be found.

So far, Du Bouleau's plans had worked perfectly. He figured we would be so upset by Rocky's accidental death, so involved in official red tape, that the remaining days of the charter would expire and we'd have to give up the treasure hunt.

There's a good chance it would have happened just that way, too.

That battered arrow point ruined everything for him. He, himself, used such perfect fishing equipment that it never occurred to him that Rocky could have gone on using a broken, bent point. And in the darkness of the cave Moeller had not noticed when he substituted Rocky's shaft for his own.

But he had good nerves. Even after it was plain that Rocky was murdered, and the investigations started, Du Bouleau kept up a front. And since we had to fall back on him as interpreter he knew pretty well what we knew.

He hadn't planned von Hellberg's murder at all. Nobody had expected anybody to go back to the spot the day after Rocky's death, because of the storm. When von Hellberg appeared, alone, Moeller went on like a robot, killing him, too.

He had not shot him. He had simply come up under the dinghy and capsized it. In the water nobody is a match for a man who can breathe under the sea. He simply grappled with Kurt and held him under until he drowned. Then he pushed the body ashore and let the waves do the rest. He pulled up the dinghy anchor and let it go ashore, too, to make it look like an accident. He was probably walking back to his island, on the sea-bottom, while Hillman and I were watching from the cliffs.

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This second killing must have worked havoc on Du Bouleau's nerves. But he probably figured he still had a chance. He must have known that sooner or later his record was going to show up. But if he could simply kill Moeller there would be no proof. And now that he knew almost where the treasure was, he might still get it himself and not have to cut Moeller in.

This is theory, of course, but Moeller thought it likely, too. He told us that the night after von Hellberg was killed, Du Bouleau came to the island in his launch.

"I did not let him come on shore," Moeller said. "I was afraid of him. I used my pistol to keep him away."

Du Bouleau used the excuse that he only wanted to take the little air tanks back to Xanadu and recharge them. Moeller said he still had plenty of air left. Then Du Bouleau got mad and reminded Moeller about turning him in to the French. Moeller didn't fall for that. He pointed out that after the murders Du Bouleau would go to the guillotine, too.

So Du Bouleau had to come back. That's when I saw him while I was smoking on deck—thinking, of course, he had simply been out night-fishing.

It made no sense at all that Moeller should have tried to kill me and probably Alex afterward. I expect that after two murders, after his tortured nights squatting on that rocky island, not even daring to make a light, he reached a kind of madness. For he was, after all, a killer, and in his tiger moods he seemed to live in an insane world where killing was normal and everything else was dreamlike.

When we asked him about it, all he could say was, "You were the last of the four—the last of the four."

That cleared up just about everything. Hillman and Heinemann took the German and the bodies with them on mules up to the main road, where a French truck met them. They went to Ajaccio to straighten out the legal details of the case.

But the E-boat was still up in the air. Or down in the water. Alex and I had that out. Aside from anything else, we felt we owed something to Rocky and von Hellberg. Apparently we were pretty near it. Unless we worked fast the story would leak out, and everybody would be after it.

Paladin looked to me like a lot of boat for two people to handle, and I didn't know a jib from jive. But Alex did.

"You be the captain," she suggested, "and I'll give the orders."

"Just like marriage," I said. "Are you sure we could do it alone?"

"Of course," she said.

"I don't mean alone that way. I mean alone without a chaperon."

She looked at me. At last she said, "Let's try it, anyway."

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"Let's try this, too," I said. I kissed her for the first time, and it was a long time.

Afterward she sighed. "Maybe we do need a chaperon after all," she said.

We found the E-boat in four days. Ironically, it was just beyond the Ile de Gargalo, hardly four hundred yards from where Moeller had sat watching us. Even more ironically, Du Bouleau's compressed-air set turned out to be indispensable. After we were through with it, by the way, we gave it to the two English ichthyologists. They'd simply been off on a three-day camping trip, doing whatever they do with fish, and thought it "most amusing" that anybody had ever thought they might be killers.

For us the tank had been, quite literally, worth its weight in gold. We found the E-boat with our ordinary gear, but she lay in about 30 feet of water. Without the breathing tank I'd never have been able to get down there and stay down.

Even with the tank it was no fun working on the E-boat. She was caught in a kind of underwater chasm and had been badly smashed up. Also, there was nothing cheerful about the skeletons caught in the wreckage.

Von Hellberg had said the money box had been locked up in his cabin, and I found it without much trouble. It was too heavy for me to take up, of course, but I inched it out into the clear. Then Alex and I, heaving together, pulled it up on the dinghy anchor line. The lock was still in good shape, after seven years, and I had to use a chisel to get it open. It was quite a moment.

The gold was in all kinds of coins: old French 20-franc pieces, English sovereigns, American double-eagles, and others I couldn't identify.

We had no idea what the gold was worth, but the paper money was easier. The French, Italian, and German moneys were worthless now—they'd all been invalidated after the war. But the dollars were still all right—soggy, but still good enough for the Treasury to accept. Aside from the British pounds, we counted forty bundles of $10,000 each in good American currency.

"I'm a fine lawyer," I told Alex. "I don't have any idea what the law is on this. Maybe the French government gets a cut. Maybe even the new German government does. And I know very well Uncle Sam will—in income tax, if nothing else. But no matter what it is, there'll still be plenty left. For Rocky's folks, too."

"And for Kurt's," she added.

As for me, I sort of got a double share. I got a wife, too.

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **BERKELY MATHER**

TITLE: ***The Fish of My Uncle's Cat***

TYPE: Crime and Detection

LOCALE: Hongkong

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *It was a holiday for little Timmy Low, the Cat-Mooner and Shanghai cleaning woman. The first omens were favorable, but then . . .*

IT WAS THE FIRST DAY OF THE MOON of the Cat, and a holiday for Tai Mei Lo. She lay flat on her back on her quilted-cotton sleeping mat looking up at the cracked ceiling, her neck supported on the little porcelain pillow that looked like a miniature beheading block.

Her fingers groped under the edge of the mat and found her worn silk purse. She shook its contents onto her bare stomach and squinted down her nose as she counted the coins with a stretched forefinger. $1.35. She grimaced slightly. This first day of her own birth month coincided, unfortunately, with the last of the foreign-devil month which meant that her pay was still twenty-four hours off.

She sighed, scooped up the coins, rose to her feet, and stood naked in the center of the room. She looked down at herself and ran her hands slowly over the firm curves of her body—a woman no longer young but still comely. Then she crossed to the earthenware bowl in the corner, spread a towel on the floor, and commenced to wash herself from head to foot—carefully, slowly, and catlike in her concentrated enjoyment of the friction of the handful of loofah fibers on her skin, and the cloying fragrance of the sinfully expensive cake of foreign-devil soap she had bought as a special indulgence for this day.

On a bamboo stool were the freshly laundered shorts and loose vest she had painstakingly handsewn herself—in plain white cotton, as befitted a widow of modesty. She drew them on and then got out

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her brocade gown. It was getting dated now. It was slit to the knee on each side and it had the characteristic high collar, but it was ankle length and looser than the cheongsam that the smart little Hongkong girls were wearing nowadays. Still, it *was* brocade and not a machine-woven Macao imitation, she told herself. There was quality here.

Then she carefully dressed the glossy coils of her hair with a few drops of sandalwood oil and fastened them into place with an ivory and jade pin, made herself a bowl of jasmine tea, took her cane shopping basket, and went out.

She walked out of Wanchai and along Hennessey Road, past the Dockyard toward the modern Babylon of lower Hongkong. This part always reminded her of San Francisco and those far-off spacious days before the war when her husband had managed the Sino-American Import Company—the days of the apartment in which her present tiny hutch of a room would have been deemed unsuitable even for her little bonded servant girl, the days of the big shiny car, of the washing machine and refrigerator.

She sighed. Perhaps those things had meant too much to her. Perhaps she had praised her husband too extravagantly for his cleverness in making it all possible, and the gods had overheard and punished her by taking him from her and wiping those marvelous things away in one hasty sale.

No, she must not think of them—not today of all days. Today was a holiday. This morning there were her widow's duties to perform at the joss house in Viaduct Road, and in the afternoon her kowtow to her husband's senior relative, old Number Two Uncle. There wouldn't be much of a present this year. She had planned a Kamling duck cooked in honey, a twist of the scented snuff that he loved, and perhaps a flask of rice wine. $1.35 wouldn't go far—certainly not after buying joss sticks to burn before the temple altar.

She turned left in Queen's Road and walked up one of the short streets that ran straight back to the sheer wall of the lower Peak, leaving the howling maelstrom of traffic behind her. There were steps at the end of it, and above them a narrow path that zigzagged and hairpinned up the steep slope, and soon she was above the soaring roofs of the city and behind her the harbor came into view.

Other people were climbing with her—Cat-Mooners like herself, taking this short steep cut to the Viaduct Road temple, dressed, for the most part, in their best clothes and some carrying paper lanterns in the stylized representation of the Cat Goddess. Last year she had burned two of them and hoped that it would be remembered. This year she could only afford joss sticks—and not many of those.

She reached Viaduct Road, and

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across it in front of her was the temple. On each side of the temple soared ten-story apartment houses and above it, on the rock wall of the Peak, of which this road was a natural shelf, was an advertisement for Coca-Cola. The temple itself, however, was a bit of old China that had been left untouched—curved eaves and a stunted pergola, and squatting on a plinth in front of it the eight-pawed, two-headed Cat Goddess.

She hurried round to the entrance and dropped ten cents into the bowl of the shaven priest who sat behind a stall on the steps. He started to hand her a packet of the larger sandalwood joss sticks, looked at her widow's mite, sneered, and substituted five of the small cheap sort—and his blessing was curt and mechanical. Eyes down and face lost, she went through the door trying not to hear his remarks to the fat little Cantonese following her, about the meanness of the Shanghai-ites, for all their brocade gowns.

The temple was dark and cavernous, lit only by the tiny nut-oil lamps round the altar and the glowing heads of the bunched joss sticks in front of it. She thrust one of her own into the guttering flame of a lamp and it ignited immediately. That was a good sign. Carefully she touched each one of the remaining four to the head of the first one and once again each caught the spark and glowed first time.

This favorable omen had never happened to her before. Behind her the little Cantonese grunted in envious approval, ignited his sandalwood sticks from hers, and then touched the hem of her gown to transfer some of her good luck to himself. She smiled wryly. Luck? $1.25 in her purse and the most important family ceremony of the year ahead of her. She kowtowed and knelt on the altar steps.

"Pien Lei," she prayed. "Cat Mother of the Seven Winds, Bride of the Dragon, Leaper of the Mountain of Adversity and Guardian of the Wall of Destiny, Seer of All Things even into the darkness of men's hearts—grant that I may go through the rest of this, your festival day, without further loss of face, and prove that your omens are not mockers."

She rose then and went quickly out of the temple, averting her eyes as she passed the priest on the steps, and hurrying across the road and down the path back to the city. The cooks and Number One boys from the big houses on the Peak would have made their purchases at the market by now and the coolies would be clearing the stallholders out before hosing down and sweeping up the litter. Now was the time for the provident to look for bargains.

She broke into a run, threading her way through the opposite moving stream of people to the temple, but at the top of the steps the toe of

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her felt-soled slipper caught the edge of a badly laid paving stone and she came heavily down on her knees. A squat cross-eyed Hakka fisherman courteously helped her to her feet and even more courteously saved her face by not laughing at her—not even when she stood and viewed with dismay and grief the rent across the front of her gown through which her grazed knees were showing.

She went slowly on to the market, blinking back the hot tears of mortification that were nearly blinding her. "Oh, Cat Mother," she prayed, "if I have offended it was without intention, but if the wind of reproof is to blow upon me further, let it be tomorrow and not any more today."

As if in answer, a scrawny stray cat crossed her path as she entered the market, stopped, rubbed itself against the gatepost, then sat and licked its paws. Not daring to breathe in case it took fright and moved off, she crept toward it, stooped, and scratched behind its ear. The cat arched its back, purred, and rubbed against her legs.

A great weight lifted from her heart. The other omens had been only negatively good. *This* was a sign. Happily she picked up the cat and cradled it under her arm, wincing with pity as she felt its skeletal bones under the loose skin. The cat purred louder.

"There shall be fish for you, little daughter of the All Seeing," she said, "even if it costs me ten cents."

Time was getting short now and the coolies were shouting as they dragged the big canvas hose up the main aisle of the market. The fish stalls were at the bottom, and already the porters were collecting their one cent squeeze-pidgins from the beggars before letting them dive into the piles of heads and guts under the rough planking. Market beggars are quicker and noisier than the gulls on the waterfront when it comes to scavenging, and it was all over even as she reached the first stall.

There were a few small mullet left on it and the man was gathering them into a basket. She asked their price and he told her thirty cents each—which was ridiculous!

She started to bargain but he was eager to get to his morning rice; so he swore at her and mocked her Shanghai accent before grudgingly coming down five cents and then refusing to budge.

She moved on but it was too late—all the other stalls were swept clear except the one opposite which was out of the question because it dealt only in huge silvery garoupa for the foreign devils. She looked down at the cat under her arm regretfully.

"I'm sorry, little daughter," she murmured. "Tomorrow I shall return, and there shall be a whole fish." But the cat had now got the rich ripe smells in its nostrils and was mewing piteously.

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"Oh, Cat Mother," she prayed, "I *have* offended you. Soften the pride and scorn of Number Two uncle and my mother-in-law when I appear almost empty-handed on this day of days."

She went back to the first stall and pointed mutely to one of the remaining mullet. The man sneered again and tossed it insolently into her basket. She felt in the side pocket of her gown for her purse. But it was not there.

All face was gone now. It was gone even before she stammered her excuses and the man snatched at her basket, broke the handle, retrieved the fish, and smacked her across the mouth with it. It didn't need the push he gave her in the chest which sent her skidding back over the greasy flagstones, finally to sit flat down on them.

The men round both stalls howled with laughter, until those round the second one realized that she was sitting on a couple of their biggest garoupa which had been laid out on the stones. Then they stopped laughing, hauled her to her feet, cuffed her, and drove her away with abuse.

She walked blindly back up the aisle, her beautiful brocade even more torn, soaked, and fouled. The cat under her arm was still mewing.

Inspector McLoughlan weighed the last of the small tin cylinders on the spring balance in front of him.

"Eight pounds five ounces total," he said. "Those cylinders with the red bands would have gone to the smokee-smokee houses—the rest would be for turning into heroin, I should say. What a haul—right in the middle of the silly season! Tell me again."

"Sounds like a shaggy dog story," grinned the Sergeant. "Timmy Low sat on a fish."

"Who's Timmy Low?"

"One of the women cleaners down at the Central Magistrate's Court. It is her day off. She's a Shanghai woman and her Cantonese is as bad as mine, but from what I could gather she was doing her shopping, had a barney with a stallkeeper, slipped, and sat smack down on a couple of big fish belonging to the stallkeeper opposite, and felt a row of hard objects inside them. She remembered that case last year when those Lantao fishermen were caught smuggling opium inside fish, so she hung around and followed them when they left the market. Tailed 'em up to a joint in Li-mun Street and then had the sense to come running back here and reporting it to Lee On in the C.I.D. duty room."

"Clever wench. I'll see her in the morning. Cleaning woman, you say?"

"Aye—second class *and* unestablished—which means she's eligible for the reward," the Sergeant said, adding sadly, "I wish someone would unestablish *me*. She'll be col-

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lecting about five thousand bucks for that lot, won't she?"

"Probably more—one-half of one per cent of the market price. Okay, give her a pat on the head and tell her to be here at nine tomorrow, sharp."

"She is outside now," said the Sergeant. "She wants to know if she can have a hundred advance."

"Why? Going on a bender to celebrate?"

"Possibly," the Sergeant grinned. "Although allowing for my lousy Cantonese I gather it's somebody's birthday. There's a party up at her husband's uncles—*and* she wants to buy some fish for her cat."

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The General had inspired his people with the will to revolt . . .

THE LIBERATOR

by KENNETH J. McCAFFREY

THE GENERAL STUDIED HIS COLlar in the mirror and decided he liked it better unbuttoned. He turned to the small dark man sitting in the corner.

"I think it looks better open, don't you, Miguel? A little more informal."

The small man got up and walked to the window.

"Yes, much better open, Miguel. It is part of the image—the careless look of the dedicated revolutionary."

The General stared at the mirror again and moved in closer. The beard wasn't just right. He took out a comb and swept an unruly tuft of hair into place. "There, that's better." He turned to the back that stood before the window. "You are quiet, Miguel Sanchez. On a day like this you should be happy."

Miguel turned slowly and faced him. Their eyes met for a moment, then the General turned away.

"It is not the way you had hoped, is it, Miguel?"

Miguel Sanchez balanced the words on his tongue like a child with hot food in his mouth. "No, General. It is not the way I had hoped."

"Please, Miguel, I am Paulo to you. Always Paulo." He made an open gesture with his hand. "The title is for others." He gestured again, indicating the window. "How is the crowd in the plaza?"

"A pickpocket's holiday." Miguel Sanchez's voice remained the same.

"Good old Miguel. The same dry humor." The General came and put his arm around the shoulder of the smaller man. "But come. One smile. This is not a day for long faces."

Sanchez wrenched himself away. His eyes flashed and his words came in an angry tumble. "Smile? You say, 'Miguel, do not be gloomy. Miguel, do you not like the collar better open?' Do you think I am like you? Do you think I am made of steel? What has become of you? Your beard is more important than the people outside. The playboy tilt of your collar means more now than all the plans we made together. What happened to the Paulo I knew in the mountains? There was a man to follow, a real man, not some egomaniac who is half fop and half power-sick tycoon." He stopped as suddenly as he started. His voice dropped to its normal calm. "You sold out the dream of our people."

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The General walked to a table in the corner and took a cigarette from an open pack. He lit it, drew deeply, and let the smoke drift lazily through his nostrils. When he turned back to Miguel he was steady, but the nerve along the side of his nose still twitched beyond his control. He looked at Sanchez and frowned.

"I did not think we would quarrel today of all days."

"I am sorry, Paulo. I did not mean to get angry, but I can never accept how you have changed."

The General stubbed out his cigarette and stared intently at the black ash. "Tell me, Miguel, did you think our revolution would be different? Did you think we could kill corruption the way we could kill our enemies?" He paused. There was no answer. "To wipe out corruption you would have to wipe out the entire race, and then I'm not sure it would not show up somehow. I simply did what any man would do."

Sanchez took a step toward the General and stopped. "But don't you see, Paulo, you are not any man. Do you think they would have followed *any* man to get shot at and tortured? Do you think just any man could have fired them with the spirit of freedom, with the will to revolt? Do you think any ordinary man could have persuaded them to give up their bread for an idea? You had a chance few men in history are given."

"Nonsense!" The General's voice roared across the room. "Do you think I am some idiot, a child to be patted on the back, a teenager to fill with empty slogans? Do you think the mountains were fun for me?" He hesitated, then went on before Miguel could answer. "I would like to have played fairy godmother too when we finally took the country. Well, it just could not be. I had to sacrifice my dreams as well as you had to—but I faced reality, not some pie-in-the-sky world. And by heaven, I made the most of it!"

The General walked to the window and gazed absently at the shifting crowd. When he spoke again his voice was quiet. "Sometimes I wonder, my friend, if *you* are the starry-eyed idealist you seem. Are you sure you don't keep fighting me because you cannot forget Maria?"

Miguel Sanchez stiffened but the General raised his hand and stopped the answer. "It was unfortunate, Miguel, but there was nothing else to do."

"You did not have to kill her." Sanchez twisted his head away so the General couldn't see his face.

"Yes, Miguel, I had to kill her. She nearly told the enemy everything to save that brother of hers." It wasn't a plea. It was a statement.

They stood together in silence against the noisy background of the restless crowd outside and each could see the dirty straw hut on the

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mountain and the young girl in black on her knees, crying. The General had a pistol in his hand and Miguel was bending over the girl, trying to stop her tears.

"You would have sold me out, would you not, Maria?" The General had spit the words, feeling the personal insult of betrayal. "Your brother knew what he was doing when he joined the revolution. He knew he might have to die."

The girl had sobbed and Miguel gently stroked her shoulder. He looked up at the General. "She is only a frightened girl, Paulo. When she is my wife things like this will not happen."

"Wife?" The General had laughed. "You must be mad, Miguel. Would you still think of marrying her? She would be a happy widow in a week." Maria had remained hunched over, staring at the ground. "Miguel, go outside for a bit. I wish to question Maria alone."

Sanchez had risen stiffly. "Is there something I should not hear?"

"You will hear." The General jerked his head in command and Miguel had gone out on the open mountain.

Neither Miguel nor the General could remember just how the shot had sounded . . .

A cloud now passed the window and darkened the floor for a moment. They both looked up and then the sun came again.

"Miguel, it is no use talking of what is done. I did not know you cared so much."

"Yes, I cared so much."

A shout arose from below. The General smiled and picked up his hat. The band started with a fanfare and the trumpets sounded commandingly. Suddenly it was still again. The General paused with his hand on the door.

"They are waiting, Miguel. They are waiting for me."

"Yes."

"Tell me, Miguel. Do you think it will hurt when I am shot?"

"No, Paulo, we will shoot very straight."

COMING ATTRACTIONS . . .

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By the noted Broadway columnist, television editor, and TV star . . .

THE MUMBLING MAN

by HY GARDNER

CARL ERBE, THE PUBLIC-RELATIONS kingpin, at one time occupied an office in the Brill Building on Broadway when he ran the Singapore Club downstairs. One afternoon a fellow strolled into Carl's office, opened his mouth to say something—but no sounds came out.

"What's wrong, bud?" the sympathetic Erbe asked, noting the fellow's tattered clothes, his pallor, and the hungry look in his eyes. "Want a meal or something?"

The man finally spoke, slowly and misty-eyed. "I don't know you and you don't know me," he mumbled, "but I'm desperate and I hear you're a right guy. If I can't get a loan of $250 my wife, five kids—we'll all be thrown on the street, starving."

Erbe was touched, and I don't mean to pun. "I'd like to help you," he said softly, "but gosh, 250 clams is a lot of loot. Tell you what I'll do. I'll give you fifty dollars—that ought to stave things off a bit."

Now the fellow really broke into tears. "You're a wonderful, fine human," he sobbed, "but I couldn't even think of accepting your fifty dollars without giving you some security. Pardon me a minute."

With that he turned his back to Carl, fumbled around a while, then handed his benefactor a small tissue-covered package and said, rather unintelligibly, "Keep that as security until I return your loan." He then slipped out of the door as quietly as he had entered.

Carl almost fell to the floor when he unravelel the tissue and saw the contents: a full set of upper and lower bridgework. Feeling the need for a drink, he took the elevator and walked despondently into the Turf Restaurant on the street floor, joined a group of music publishers from the same building, and told his story.

"Why, you prime sucker," they all laughed. "If you do a little checking, you'll find you're about the tenth dope this smoothie has taken in. This guy's got more two-dollar bridges than the New York Port Authority, and the cops would give an eyetooth to lay their hands on him!"

Erbe shook his head and tossed the security into an ashtray.

"Well, anyway," he grinned foolishly, "you've got to admit the guy's sure got his teeth into a beautiful racket."

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